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US edition

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▲ *Donald Trump attends a rally to support Republican candidates ahead of midterm elections, in Dayton, Ohio, on 7 November. Photograph: Gaelen Morse/Reuters*

Trump lawyers find two more classified documents at Florida storage unit

Hugo Lowell in Washington

Donald Trump's lawyers found at least two more documents bearing classification markings inside boxes at a storage unit in Florida when they searched through items that were brought from the White House at the end of his administration, one source familiar with the matter said on Tuesday.

The new discovery could exacerbate the former president's legal exposure after the FBI seized 103 documents marked classified at his Mar-a-Lago resort in August as part of the justice department's criminal investigation into the possible unauthorized retention of national security information and obstruction of justice.

The presence of documents marked classified in a second location beyond Mar-a-Lago, earlier reported by the Washington Post, appears to confirm the justice department's suspicions, communicated to Trump's lawyers in October, that Trump possessed additional government records.

Trump's lawyers found the documents after the former president retained an outside firm to search four locations after a federal judge ordered his legal team to conduct a more thorough search to make sure all documents marked classified had been returned to the government.

The outside firm ended up searching a number of Trump's properties, according to another source, including Trump Tower in New York, Trump Bedminster golf club in New Jersey, the Mar-a-Lago resort and the external storage unit in West Palm Beach, Florida, which has been understood to have been controlled by a federal agency.

According to emails released by the General Services Administration, a government agency that assists in presidential transitions, Trump used a storage facility in West Palm Beach to hold some materials that were packed up from the White House and had been temporarily held in Virginia.

That storage facility was used to hold at least three pallets of boxes that had been packed up by Trump White House staffers and the GSA initially transported to an office space in Virginia before sending them to Florida in September 2021, the emails show.

The contents of the boxes in the pallets do not appear to have ever been catalogued, the second source said. It was not clear whether the storage facility referenced in the emails was the same storage unit where the new documents were found – but it was the place from where Trump's lawyers sent two dozen boxes to the National Archives earlier this year.

The justice department declined to comment. A Trump spokesman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Trump's lawyers were ordered in recent weeks to conduct a more thorough search of items in the former president's possession by Beryl Howell, the chief US district court judge for the District of Columbia, in a sealed order issued as part of a closed-door court battle.

The order capped a weeks-long process that started after the justice department expressed concern that Trump still had additional documents marked classified in his possession, potentially at other properties, after the FBI seized thousands of materials at Mar-a-Lago on 8 August.

Trump was served with a grand jury subpoena in May demanding the return of all government records – bearing classification markings or otherwise – in the possession of the "45 Office", to which his lawyers responded by turning over a double-taped folder containing responsive documents.

The double-taped folder contained documents found by Trump attorney Evan Corcoran in a basement storage room at Mar-a-Lago, the second source told the Guardian, and got another Trump attorney Christina Bobb to sign a caveated attestation certifying compliance with the subpoena.

But in the following months, the justice department developed evidence that other sensitive materials remained at Mar-a-Lago, and the FBI retrieved 103 documents marked classified in Trump's office and in the basement storage room, according to the unsealed

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search warrant affidavit.

The justice department then developed suspicions that Trump potentially was in possession of still more government records he should no longer have access to, and eventually asked Howell to intervene and order a second search of Trump's belongings, the second source said.

Former Florida solicitor general Christopher Kise, who had by then been added to Trump's legal team, had suggested retaining an outside firm to conduct another search even before the court order, though that idea was initially rejected by some of the more bullish Trump lawyers on the team.

But when the court order necessitated a more thorough search, Trump engaged the outside firm. The FBI is understood to have been invited to observe the search of at least one of the properties, but declined the offer, as is typical for searches not done by law enforcement, the source said.

US supreme court hears case that could radically reshape elections

Ed Pilkington and agencies

The US supreme court heard arguments on Wednesday in Moore v Harper, one of this term's highest profile and most contentious cases which has the potential to fundamentally reshape elections for Congress and the presidency.

The justices appeared to be starkly divided along predictable ideological lines as they mulledover the power of state courts to strike down congressional districts drawn by state legislatures because they violate state constitutions.

Republicans from North Carolina who brought the case argue that a provision of the US constitution known as the elections clause gives state lawmakers virtually total control over the "times, places and manner" of congressional elections, including redistricting, and cuts state courts out of the process.

The Republicans are advancing a concept called the "independent state legislature theory", never before adopted by the supreme court but cited approvingly by four conservative justices.

The direction of questioning at Wednesday's hearing suggested thatthree of those conservative justices – Samuel Alito, Neil Gorsuch and Clarence Thomas – were open to the idea of adopting the theory, despite decades of precedent from their own court dismissing it. They seemed to have the slightly more tentative backing of Brett Kavanaugh, who was part of the legal team in 2000 that assisted George W Bush through Bush v Gore, the case that in modern times put the independent state legislature theory on the map.

On the other side of the argument, the three liberal-leaning justices were profoundly critical of the notion that state legislatures should be given free rein to control federal elections virtually unrestrained by state constitutions and judicial review from state courts. Questions from John Roberts suggested he might be seeking a more narrowly-drawn compromise position.

Which left all eyes on Amy Coney Barrett, the third of Donald Trump's three appointees. Potentially, she might find herself casting the decisive vote.

Though it gives little clue as to which side of the fence Barrett will be standing on when the ruling comes down, she did ask several probing questions of the lawyer representing North Carolina's Republicans. She said that those pushing for state legislatures to be freed up from oversight had a "problem" defining their terms, and she questioned whether the theory had any bearing in legal text.

For their part, the liberal justices – Elena Kagan, Ketanji Brown Jackson and Sonia Sotomayor – robustly argued that incorporating the theory into constitutional law would be a threat to democracy. Elena Kagan cited three recent supreme court rulings that all counter the theory.

Kagan made an impassioned speech about the potential impact of siding with North Carolina's Republicans. "Think about consequences, because this is a theory with big consequences … This is a proposal that gets rid of the normal checks and balances on the way big governmental decisions are made in this country, at exactly the time when they are needed most."

She warned that a broad ruling could unleash state legislatures to carry out extreme forms of gerrymandering, tear up voter protections and even certify election results according to their own political interests.

Moore v Harper came about after the North Carolina state supreme court struck down districts drawn by Republicans who control the legislature because they heavily favored Republicans in the highly competitive state. The court-drawn map used in last month's elections for Congress produced a 7-7 split between Democrats and Republicans.

North Carolina is among six states in recent years in which state courts have ruled that overly partisan redistricting for Congress violated their state constitutions. The others are Florida, Maryland, New York, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

State courts have become the only legal forum for challenging partisan congressional maps since the supreme court ruled in 2019 that those lawsuits cannot be brought in federal court.

In North Carolina, Republican lawmakers will not have to wait for the court's decision to produce a new congressional map that is expected to have more Republican districts.

Even as Democrats won half the state's 14 congressional seats, Republicans seized control of the state supreme court. Two newly elected Republican justices give them a 5-2 edge that makes it more likely than not that the court would uphold a map with more Republican districts.

One of the striking features about Wednesday's legal debate was how the usual ideological positions of the two sides were turned on their heads. The conservative justices, who have often invoked states' rights in previous rulings – not least in last year's seminal decision to overturn abortion rights – sounded at times to be almost anti-federalist.

After the US solicitor general, Elizabeth Prelogar, accused the petitioners of making an "atextual, ahistorical, and destabilizing interpretation of the elections clause", Thomas intervened. "I must say, it seems a bit ironic that you're on the other side of the federalism issue," he said, apparently unaware of the irony of his own position.

By contrast, lawyers speaking against the state legislature theory turned on several occasions to the historical record of the founding fathers as well as close textual analysis of the constitution – tactics normally associated with the rightwing supermajority. "Over 233 years, this court has never second-guessed a state court interpretation of its own constitution in any context," said Neal Katyal, a lawyer representing Common Cause, an ethics-in-government group which is opposing what it claims is an attempted Republican power grab in North Carolina.

▲ *The US supreme court is hearing a case based on the radical 'independent state legislature theory', to which four conservative justice appear sympathetic. Photograph: Michael Reynolds/EPA*

Health experts in conundrum over best way to avoid winter 'tripledemic'

Eric Berger

Dr Jason Newland, a pediatric infectious disease doctor at St Louis children's hospital, is just waiting for his cold to start. "I can list off about 10 people right now that have had some sort of illness in the past five days," Newland said.

That's because the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) and influenza seasons started months earlier than usual, amid the continuing spread of Covid-19 and the common cold. The flu hospitalization rate is the highest it's been in a decade, according to public health officials. Scientists have described the collision of viruses as a "tripledemic".

"This is an extraordinary event, and it is stressing the health care resources in many parts of the country very, very substantially," said William Schaffner, an infectious disease expert at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine.

Fortunately, despite their concerns, public health officials are not calling for people to socially distance and avoid holiday gatherings, as many of them did earlier in the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to increased isolation and sometimes harmed people's mental health. Instead, they say there are other measures individuals should take to avoid spreading the viruses and becoming severely ill as meeting outdoors becomes harder in the winter.

"I think the vast majority of people can gather and do it safely, and there are tools available to make it safer," said Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist and director of the Pandemic Center at Brown University School of Public Health.

The populations that are most at risk from the viruses are babies, young children and older adults, the infectious disease experts said. The unseasonal spike in cases of flu and RSV, likely due to the social distancing and masking employed during the pandemic, have overwhelmed children's hospitals around the country, according to public health officials.

At the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio, there has been an influx of babies and young children with one or more of the viruses who are struggling to breathe and need supplemental oxygen to stay safe and sometimes must be admitted to the hospital, said Dr Rachel Pearson, assistant professor of pediatrics.

In addition to the viruses, pediatric hospitals must also treat adolescents who end up in the emergency room because of self-inflicted injuries, and the numbers have increased significantly over the last decade, according to the New York Times.

That volume of pediatric patients due to viruses and self-harm has forced healthcare providers to get creative

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with space at the hospital, Pearson said.

"Usually when you get admitted, you go upstairs from the ER to a regular hospital room, but if all the regular hospital rooms are full, then the kid will stay" in the emergency room under the care of hospitalists such as Pearson and her team, who would normally see them elsewhere, she said. "Every hospitalist I've talked to anywhere is dealing with" pediatric bed shortages.

As for adults over age 65, Nuzzo is concerned because of the low uptake of the second Covid-19 vaccine booster. Only about one-third of that population has received the most recent booster, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"It's surprisingly low for that age group, despite the fact that that age group has typically had high vaccination coverage," Nuzzo said.

And getting the latest Covid-19 vaccine booster and the flu vaccine is one of the best ways people can protect themselves from the viruses, the experts said.

"Neither of these vaccines is perfect," Schaffner said. "Both of them are very good. They do their best in preventing the complications, the most serious aspects of these illnesses, so they are clearly of value to the individual. Both of them also, to a degree, diminish transmission, so they contribute to the general health of families and communities."

▲ *A nurse holds a nose swab at a drive-through testing site for coronavirus, flu and RSV in Seattle, Washington. Photograph: Lindsey Wasson/Reuters*

Still, public health officials are not urging people to socially distance to avoid overwhelming hospitals as they often were during Covid-19 surges.

But to gather more safely, they recommend that people use rapid Covid-19 tests.

"In addition to obliging everybody to be vaccinated who attends, ask people to take a rapid test the morning of the get-together and say, 'If you're negative, come celebrate. If you're not, we'll contact you on FaceTime,'" Schaffner suggested.

The idea of staying home when sick also, of course, applies to flu and RSV.

"If the grandchildren become snotty-nosed kids – that is they get sick with a respiratory infection – that's not the time to visit grandma," Schaffner said. "If you do become ill, please do not go to work, school, the gym, religious services or other communal gatherings because you will be a dreaded spreader."

The infectious disease experts also recommended that people frequently wash their hands. Unlike Covid-19, RSV lives on surfaces.

Masking can also be a helpful tool. But Nuzzo recognizes that a lot of people don't want to mask around their families any more.

On a ferry ride to a Thanksgiving gathering, Nuzzo sat indoors because it was cold and wore a mask because it was crowded. But once there, she and her family did not wear masks.

Masking "adds safety for sure. As does opening the windows, as does testing, as does having air filtration devices running, as does gathering outdoors instead of indoors", Nuzzo said. "Those things all still help, but I think people are making decisions differently about whether that feels worth it to them."

Fortunately, there are indications that the RSV season could soon reach its peak and begin falling, according to the infectious disease experts. And for Covid-19, there is less vulnerability because of the number of people who have been vaccinated against it and contracted the virus, Nuzzo said.

"If people want to be as safe as possible, wear masks," Newland said. "We know that will protect people. And so I really think we have to come to individual decisions and choices and then respect one another."

If someone says, 'I have some high-risk people in my home, I would prefer that you wear a mask,' then that's what we should be doing," Newland added.

Peru president removed from office and charged with 'rebellion' after alleged coup attempt

Dan Collyns in Lima

Peru's president, Pedro Castillo, has been removed from office and detained on charges of "rebellion" after he announced he would shutter congress and install a "government of exception" – just hours before he was due to face an impeachment vote.

The public prosecutor's office confirmed late on Wednesday that Castillo had been arrested and charged with allegedly "breaching constitutional order", after he was accused of an attempted coup and seen fleeing the presidential palace.

Earlier in the day, the country's national police tweeted that "former president" Pedro Castillo had been detained, shortly after congress voted to remove him.

The vote came after Castillo ordered a night-time curfew and the reorganisation of the judiciary and prosecutor's office, which is investigating him for alleged corruption and influence trafficking – charges which he denies.

Castillo's vice-president, Dina Boluarte, described the move as a coup attempt, and hours later was sworn in as the new president, becoming the first female head of state in Peru's history.

Boluarte called for a political truce and the installation of a national unity government. "What I ask for is a space, a time to rescue the country," she said.

The day of high drama put an end to Castillo's tumultuous 17 months in power, which has already seen five cabinets, more than 80 ministers, six criminal investigations and two failed attempts to impeach him.

▲ *Dina Boluarte is sworn in after Castillo's removal. Photograph: Sebastian Castañeda/Reuters*

In a televised speech, Castillo said he would temporarily shut down congress, launch a "government of exception" to rule by decree and called for new legislative elections.

The move immediately prompted mass resignations from the cabinet, and accusations that Castillo had attempted to seize power illegally.

"I strongly condemn this coup d'état and call on the international community to assist in the democratic re-establishment of democracy in Peru," tweeted the foreign minister, César Landa, as he announced his resignation. "Castillo took this decision without my knowledge or support."

Castillo's bid to avoid an impeachment vote swiftly turned into an own goal as the armed forces and the police withdrew their support, saying, in a joint statement, that Castillo's move was "contrary to the established constitutional order".

Meanwhile, Peru's constitutional court called Castillo's decision to dissolve congress "a coup" and said the leader was no longer in charge of the country.

Castillo's announcement prompted comparisons with the notorious "autogolpe" or self-coup of April 1992, in which then-president Alberto Fujimori dissolved congress and sent soldiers and tanks on to the streets of Lima.

"What has happened in Peru is a coup d'état," said Fernando Tuesta, a political science professor at Lima's Pontifical Catholic University. "Nothing announced by former president Pedro Castillo is allowed by the constitution."

The U.S. Embassy in Lima condemned Castillo's move. "The United States emphatically urges President Castillo to reverse his attempt to close Congress and allow democratic institutions in Peru to work according to the constitution," the embassy said in a tweet. "We encourage the Peruvian public to stay calm during this uncertain time."

Mexico's president Andrés Manuel López Obrador called for "democratic stability for the benefit of the people". In a string of tweets, the leftist leader said that an atmosphere of "confrontation and hostility" had led Castillo to take decisions that ultimately served his opponents, and led to his removal from office.

Diego Almagro, secretary general of the Organisation of American States, said the constitutional order had been disrupted in Peru and tweeted his "support for "democracy, peace and institutionality in Peru and the urgent need to restore the democratic path in the country."

Hundreds of protesters gathered outside Congress rejoicing Castillo's fall, though most of the country has remained calm throughout the rapid succession of the day's events.

Castillo became president winning by the narrowest of margins in June 2021, shaking up the country's entrenched class system.

The former primary school teacher, farmer and union activist had no pre-

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vious governing experience, and took office as an outsider, pledging to support poor Peruvians who had been left behind by the country's stellar economic growth since the beginning of the century.

His win reflected massive disenchantment with the political elite after numerous corruption scandals.

But the novice president made numerous blunders, appointing barely qualified ministers and accumulating allegations of corruption and influence trafficking linked to his family and allies, which were investigated by the public prosecutor's office.

"Castillo is a symptom of the crisis rather than the cause," said Natalia Sobrevilla, professor of Latin American history at the University of Kent. Two of his predecessors faced two impeachment motions each: Pedro Pablo Kuczynski resigned rather than face impeachment and his successor, Martín Vizcarra, was ousted in November 2020 after dissolving congress a year before.

Despite his unpopularity, Castillo has consistently had higher approval ratings than congress. A survey by the Institute of Peruvian Studies last month found 86% disapproval of Congress, and only 10% approval, while Castillo's negative ratings were 61% and 31% approve of his performance.

In his address on Tuesday, Castillo said: "Throughout the 17 months of my administration, a certain sector of Congress has focused solely on removing me from office, because they never accepted the results of an election that you, dear Peruvians, defined with your votes."

Last month, an OAS delegation visited Peru at Castillo's behest after he requested that the organisation activate its democratic charter, alleging that congress and the prosecutor's office were attempting a coup against him.

Castillo's opponents argued that he was the one attempting a coup by sidelining congress.

"Pedro Castillo was dictator for only two hours," tweeted Iván Lanegra, secretary-general of the Peruvian NGO Transparencia.

Ex-Theranos exec Sunny Balwani sentenced to nearly 13 years in prison

Kari Paul

Sunny Balwani, the former Theranos executive and ex-romantic partner of Elizabeth Holmes, has been sentenced to nearly 13 years in prison over his role in the now-defunct blood testing firm.

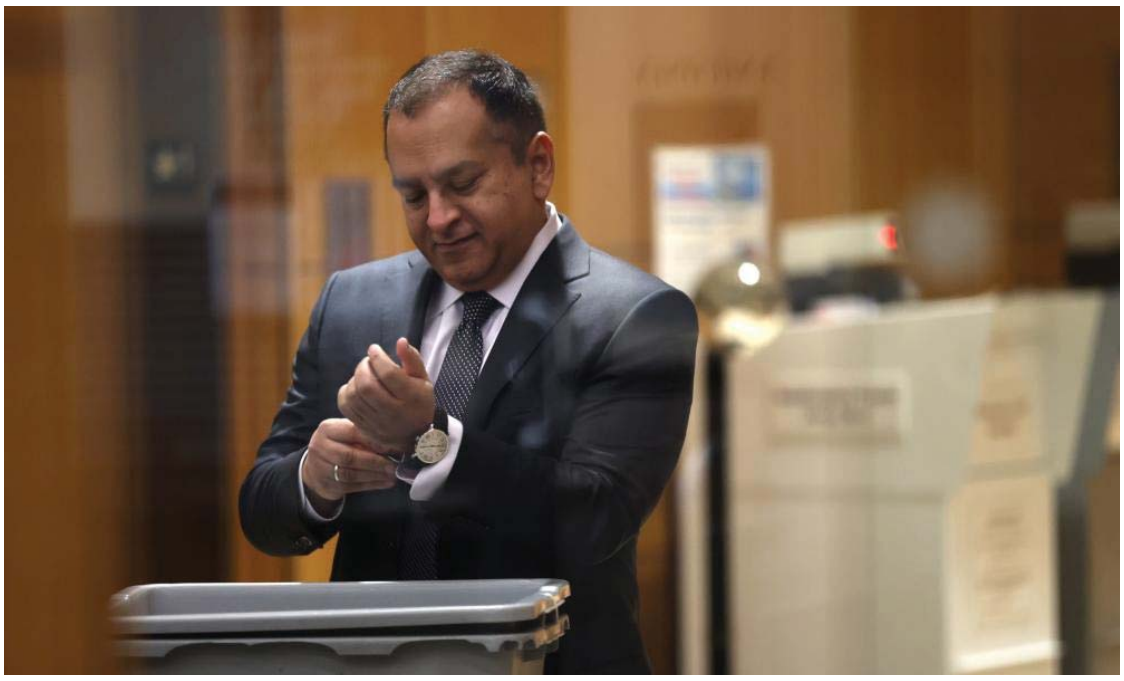
The sentence is slightly longer than that given to Holmes, who was his accomplice in one of Silicon Valley's biggest scandals, just a few weeks ago.

Balwani, who spent six years as Theranos's chief operating officer, was convicted in July on all 12 charges brought against him for defrauding Theranos investors and patients. His sentencing comes after co-conspirator Holmes received more than 11 years on 18 November on four charges of defrauding investors. She was acquitted on patient-related charges.

Balwani's sentence was less than the 15 years sought by federal prosecutors, who depicted him as a ruthless, power-hungry figure. But it is substantially longer than the four to 10 months sought by his lawyers.

Throughout his 13-week trial, which began in March, Balwani's lawyers painted the executive as a tireless worker who "put his money where his mouth is", investing $15m of his own fortune into Theranos.

Prosecutors argued Balwani, who at one point oversaw the Theranos lab, steered the company along with Holmes. "I am responsible for everything at Theranos," Balwani's text messages shared in court said. "All have been my decisions too."



▲ Former Theranos COO Ramesh "Sunny" Balwani goes through a security checkpoint at a San Jose court. Photograph: Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

Lawyers for Balwani had requested he receive only probation and no prison time, arguing that his personal investment losses in Theranos constituted sufficient punishment. They also argued he did not seek the "fame or media attention" that Holmes did as head of the company.

Prosecutors meanwhile urged a sentence of 15 years and $803m in restitution. They argued that through inaccurate blood tests at Theranos, Balwani had shown "conscious or reckless risk of death or serious bodily injury" toward patients and deserved a longer sentence than Holmes.

"Mr Balwani is not a victim. He is the perpetrator of the fraud," prosecutor Jeffrey Schenk said in closing arguments for Balwani's trial.

The sentencing of Balwani marks the latest milestone in the years-long saga of Theranos, which Holmes founded after dropping out of Stanford at 19 years old. Promising a revolutionary technology that could run hundreds of health tests on just a drop of blood, Theranos attracted big-name backers such as the former secretary of state Henry Kissinger and media mogul Rupert Murdoch.

After years of promoting the technology, Holmes and Balwani were warned that the blood tests were inaccurate, but they continued to raise money from investors, and deployed the technology in some Walgreens stores.

The US district judge Edward Davila said the financial statements drawn up by Balwani "weren't just projections, they were lies" and "a true flight from honest business practices".

Theranos was at one point valued at more than $9bn, but began to crumble after reporting in the Wall Street Journal in 2015 revealed shortcomings and inaccuracies in its core technology. Holmes and Balwani were charged with fraud after the company dissolved in 2018.

The outcomes of both trials have been seen as harbingers for a new era in Silicon Valley, in which companies can no longer ride unchecked hype and make false promises to secure funding.

The former federal prosecutor Amanda Kramer said the harsher sentence seemed appropriate, given that the jury in Balwani's trial had convicted him on every count while jurors in Holmes' separate case acquitted her on some charges and deadlocked on others.

"It's not surprising that he got a more severe sentence because his misconduct was was more severe," Kramer said.

Balwani and Holmes met around the same time she dropped out of Stanford University to start Theranos in 2003. While on the witness stand in her trial, Holmes accused Balwani of manipulating her through years of emotional and sexual abuse. Balwani's attorney has denied the allegations.

Herschel Walker's son revels in father's Georgia Senate runoff defeat

Richard Luscombe

Among the many detractors celebrating Herschel Walker's defeat in the Georgia Senate runoff was one closer to home: son Christian, who expressed his delight on Twitter that the state had rejected his controversial father.

"Don't beat women, hold guns to peoples [sic] heads, fund abortions then pretend your [sic] pro-life, stalk cheerleaders, leave your multiple minor children alone to chase more fame, lie, lie, lie, say stupid crap, and make a fool of your family," the younger Walker said in the first of a flurry of tweets posted on Tuesday night as the Democrat Raphael Warnock was projected to be the winner.

▲ Herschel Walker and his wife Julie Blanchard leave after he delivered his concession speech in Atlanta. Not all his family was upset about his defeat. Photograph: Alex Wong/Getty Images

"And then maybe you can win a Senate seat."

It can never be known how much damage the younger Walker's social media posts during the campaign, castigating his father for abandoning his wife and children, running off with other women and paying for girlfriends' abortions, did to his father's hopes of reaching Washington DC.

But an early happy family reunion would seem unlikely in the wake of Christian's latest barrage of messages and insults.

"Don't compare Warnock running over his wife's foot to my father holding guns and knives to my mothers [sic] throat, threatening to kill his therapist, her, and one of his adultresses in a therapy session, and telling my mom and I he was going to beat our asses," he wrote in a forthright statement.

In a follow-up post, he paid tribute to his mother and Herschel Walker's ex-wife Cindy Grossman, who recalled how in 2008 her husband allegedly held a gun to her temple and said: "I'm going to blow your effing brains out."

"This is my amazing mom who's had her name and image dragged through the media unwillingly... Shoutout to every strong mother whose story goes untold. We love you," he wrote.

Observers, however, will note that Christian was not always so antago-

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nistic. In a December 2021 post to his 282,000 followers, the podcast host and self-declared "free speech radicalist" announced how "honored" he was to introduce his father at his patron Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida, proudly calling him a "future senator".

Democrats ditch Manchin's 'dirty deal' after opposition from climate activists

Nina Lakhani in New York

▲ *Manchin's proposed plan would have weakened safeguards and expedited permits to construct pipelines and other fossil fuel infrastructure. Photograph: Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images*

A last-ditch effort to force through legislation that would weaken environmental protections and fast-track energy projects has failed.

Joe Manchin, the fossil fuel-friendly senator from West Virginia, had attempted to latch the controversial deregulation and permitting reforms to a must-pass defense bill – after failing to get his so-called "dirty deal" passed earlier this year.

The proposal to attach his bill to the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), an annual appropriations bill that will be voted on later this week, was reportedly supported by Joe Biden and House leader Nancy Pelosi.

But progressive lawmakers and hundreds of climate, public health and youth groups opposed the move to pass such consequential reforms without proper scrutiny. Manchin's legislation would weaken environmental safeguards and expedite permits to construct pipelines and other fossil fuel infrastructure while restricting public input and legal challenges.

On Tuesday, more than 750 organizations sent a letter to the House speaker, Nancy Pelosi, and congressional leadership opposing what they call a "cruel and direct attack on environmental justice communities". Attaching the "dirty deal" to the NDAA, which would have been one of Pelosi's final acts as speaker, threatened her legacy and the party's climate credibility, the groups said.

The deal was ditched – for now at least – amid mounting criticism aimed at the Democratic leadership.

Environmental groups welcomed the news, but warned the fossil fuel industry would not give up.

Ariel Moger, government and political affairs director at Friends of the Earth, said: "Manchin's efforts to tie his dirty deal to any must-pass legislation he can get his hands on are undemocratic and potentially devastating for the planet. With momentum on the side of frontline communities, the fight will continue until the bill dies at the end of this Congress."

Jeff Ordower, 350.org's North America director, said: "Senator Manchin cannot get away with last-ditch efforts to push forward his fossil fuel fast tracking bill. The industry will keep trying these secretive, last minute efforts to push forward dirty deals, so we will continue to be alert and we won't let up the fight."

Manchin, who receives more campaign donations from the fossil fuel industry than any other lawmaker, warned of dire consequences for America's energy security. He said: "The American people will pay the steepest price for Washington once again failing to put common sense policy ahead of toxic tribal politics. This is why the American people hate politics in Washington."

Manchin's bill, described by environmentalists as a "fossil fuel wishlist", was first attached as a side deal to Biden's historic climate bill, the Inflation Reduction Act, but was eventually thwarted after widespread opposition from progressive Democrats and civil society groups. It included limits on legal challenges to new energy projects including the 303-mile Mountain Valley gas pipeline across the Appalachian mountains that has been stalled by concerned communities and environmental groups in West Virginia and Virginia.

He and other proponents have said that fast-track permitting is needed for a rapid transition to renewables and in order to modernize the country's outdated power transmission systems.

But Jeff Merkley, the Democratic senator representing Oregon, said Manchin's deal was a dirty one, and had nothing to do with renewables. "This [bill] will give a whole lot more impetus to fossil fuels and run over the top of ordinary people raising concerns, that's why it's a dirty deal. This is a real travesty in terms of legislative deliberation, and in terms of environmental justice."

On Tuesday, Rashida Tlaib, the Democratic congresswoman from Michigan, had called on her colleagues to stand up against the fossil fuel industry and the undemocratic manner in which leadership was trying to push through the bill without scrutiny. She said: "It's outrageous enough that Congress wants to spend another $847bn on our military-industrial complex, the largest annual military budget in history; we cannot allow them to then ram through Manchin's dirty deal in the process."

The NDAA is considered a must-pass bill because it authorizes pay increases and compensation for harmed troops, as well as establishing the following year's personnel, arms purchasing and geopolitical policies.

Environmental and climate justice groups warned Democrats that frontline communities would not forget and would hold them accountable in 2024 if the deregulation bill was pushed through.

"To think that this is happening at the hands of Democrats, and their very last action of power is going to be to hurt our communities and strip our voice is really hurtful. I feel betrayed," said Maria Lopez Nunez, deputy director of the New Jersey-based Ironbound Community Corporation and member of the White House environmental justice advisory council.

"For any Democrat that's listening, if you're playing along to this charade, our community will call you out and we will hold you accountable."

On Wednesday, Manchin launched yet another bid to garner Republican support for his bill in the Senate, in hope of getting it through as an appendage to the NDAA. It seems likely to fail.

"Nobody wants Manchin's filthy lump of coal, no matter how many ways he tries to polish it," said Jean Su, energy justice program director at the Center for Biological Diversity. "Speaker Pelosi and Leader Schumer need to see this dirty deal for what it is and leave it as a failed footnote in the 2022 history books."

San Francisco investigating Twitter over complaint it added beds to office rooms

Dani Anguiano in Los Angeles

▲ *A Twitter logo hangs outside the company's San Francisco offices. Photograph: Noah Berger/AP*

Twitter is under investigation by city officials in San Francisco following a complaint that the company allegedly converted rooms in its headquarters to sleeping quarters, an inquiry that has drawn scorn from Elon Musk.

As of Monday, the office has "modest bedrooms featuring unmade mattresses, drab curtains and giant conference-room telepresence monitors" with four to eight beds a floor, employees told Forbes. The changes appear to be part of Musk's plan for "hardcore Twitter" in which he's demanded workers dedicate "long hours at high intensity" after he fired nearly half the company's workforce.

But the San Francisco Chronicle reported the company has not applied for any permits to use portions of the building for residential purposes.

The San Francisco department of building inspection confirmed to several media outlets that it is investigating the matter after receiving a complaint and that it plans to inspect the company's headquarters.

"We need to make sure the building is being used as intended," a department spokesperson, Patrick Hannan, told the Washington Post. "There are different building code requirements for residential buildings, including those being used for short-term stays. These codes make sure people are using spaces safely."

The department has contacted the building representatives to conduct an inspection and if the headquarters are no longer up to building code, it will issue a notice of violation. They city treats all property complaints and owners the same, Hannan said.

"No one is above the law," Hannan said.

Musk was critical of the investigation. "So city of SF attacks companies providing beds for tired employees instead of making sure kids are safe from fentanyl. Where are your priorities @LondonBreed!?" he said on Twitter with a link to an article detailing an account from a father who says his baby overdosed on fentanyl after being exposed to the drug at a city playground.

No city or police officials have confirmed whether or not the child's emergency was the result of fentanyl expo-

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sure.

Some workers have already reported sleeping in company headquarters. Twitter's director of product management, Esther Crawford, shared a photo last month of her sleeping in the office with an eye mask and sleeping bag. "When your team is pushing round the clock to make deadlines sometimes you #SleepWhereYouWork," Crawford wrote on Twitter.

Employees told Forbes that no announcement was made about the new beds but that they believed they were there so workers could stay in the office overnight.

"It's not a good look," they said. "It's yet another unspoken sign of disrespect. There is no discussion. Just like, beds showed up."

Colombia activist murders reach record high of 199 this year

Reuters in Bogotá

Colombia will end the year with at least 199 killings of social leaders and human rights defenders – the highest level recorded – due to attacks by illegal armed groups in areas tied to the drug trade, the country's human rights ombudsman has said.

In the first eleven months of the year, 199 people were murdered, higher than the total number of social leaders and rights defenders killed in 2021 and 2020, when 145 people and 182 people were killed respectively, the ombudsman said.

"It's an alarming and unprecedented figure, the highest since 2016, when we started keeping records," said ombudsman Carlos Camargo.

"There's a correlation between the increase in the killings of social leaders and human rights defenders with the increase in illicit crops in different territories and operations by illegal armed groups that dispute territorial control of drug trafficking routes," Camargo added.

▲ *A sign reading 'No more murders of women leaders' during a peace vigil in Bogota in May. Such murders have not slowed since Gustavo Petro took office. Photograph: Luisa González/Reuters*

Such murders have not slowed since President Gustavo Petro – the country's first leftist leader – took control in August. Some 66 leaders and rights defenders have been killed during Petro's administration so far.

The president's office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

According to the ombudsman's office, the provinces of Narino, Cauca, Putumayo, Antioquia and Arauca have been the most affected by violence against social leaders and human rights defenders this year.

Colombia's government recently restarted peace negotiations with the National Liberation Army (ELN) leftist guerrilla group in Venezuela.

It also hopes to implement the 2016 peace agreement signed between the government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) with dissident factions of the now demobilized guerrilla group that reject the accord.

The government also wants to subdue criminal gangs linked to drug trafficking in exchange for benefits such as reduced prison sentences.

The numbers on community and human rights leader killings in Colombia vary widely depending on the source.

Vladimir Putin says Russia's war in Ukraine could be 'long-term process'

Andrew Roth in Moscow

Vladimir Putin has admitted Russia's war in Ukraine could turn into a "long-term process" as he sought to defend an invasion in which Russian troops have been forced to retreat and even airbases deep inside Russia have come under attack.

Speaking to members of his personal human rights council on Wednesday, Putin claimed that Russia would not use nuclear weapons first in any conflict, denied that Russian troops were deserting en masse from the field of battle, and claimed he would not need to mobilise more troops, a process that has caused considerable upheaval in Russia.

But mainly the Russian president defended the "special military operation" – his preferred term for what he openly admitted was a Russian war of conquest that he compared with the territorial ambitions of former Russian tsars.

"As for the slow process of the special military operation, then, of course, it can be a long-term process," Putin said. "But then you mentioned that new territories had appeared. This is such a significant result for Russia … The Azov Sea has become an internal Russian sea. Even Peter I had fought for access to the Azov Sea."

▲ *Putin has denied his administration is planning for another round of mass mobilisation Photograph: Mikhail Metzel/AP*

Russia has been forced to abandon some of those "annexed" territories, notably fleeing the city of Kherson last month due to a sweeping Ukrainian counterattack. Russia now shells the city of Kherson regularly from the other side of the Dnipro River, in effect attacking what it considers its own territory.

The foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, defended that tactic last week by saying the Russians had also shelled Stalingrad during the second world war.

In his remarks on Wednesday, Putin denied his administration was planning for another round of mass mobilisation. He claimed that of 300,000 mobilised Russians, just half had been sent into the conflict zone, while the others were still at training ranges.

"In these conditions, any talk about additional mobilisation proceedings simply doesn't make sense. The state and the defence ministries simply don't need this at present," he said. The previous round of mobilisation, announced in mid-September, had been preceded by official denials as well.

Putin also denied the Russian army had suffered from mass desertions in Ukraine fuelled by poor conditions and low morale. That followed reports from independent Russian media about secret prison camps in Russian-occupied Donbas where dozens of soldiers who had refused to fight were being held in abysmal conditions.

"Are there guys who deserted their combat posts? Yes, it happened … less and less now," he said. "I repeat once again that no cases of such nature [desertions] have a mass character."

Putin dedicated some of his remarks to questions about the potential for nuclear war, which he said was growing more likely due to the conflict with the west.

"This threat is increasing, I can't deny it," Putin said in response to a question, adding that Russia would not use those weapons first.

"We have not gone crazy, we are aware of what nuclear weapons are. We have these means, and they are more advanced and more modern than those of any other nuclear country. As of today, this is an obvious fact.

"We are not going to wave these weapons around like a razor, running around the world, but of course we act with the understanding that they exist."

Raphael Warnock wins Georgia runoff, bolstering Democratic Senate majority

Joan E Greve in Washington

The Democratic incumbent, Raphael Warnock, won the Georgia Senate runoff on Tuesday, securing his first full term and delivering a 51st seat to bolster his party's majority in the chamber.

The Associated Press called the race about three and a half hours after polls closed in Georgia, as Warnock led the Republican candidate, Herschel Walker, by approximately 40,000 votes.

Shortly after that, Warnock took the stage at his campaign's victory party to thank his supporters. The senior pastor at the Atlanta church where Martin Luther King Jr once preached, Warnock has held one of Georgia's two Senate seats since winning a special election in 2021. As he began his remarks in Atlanta, supporters chanted: "Six more years!"

Warnock told the crowd: "After a hard-fought campaign – or should I say campaigns – it is my honor to utter the four most powerful words ever spoken in a democracy: the people have spoken."

One of 12 children born to a father who was also a pastor and a mother who once picked cotton, Warnock reflected on the unlikelihood of his path to the Senate. His mother was with him at his victory party, after she had the opportunity to again cast a ballot for her son.

"I am Georgia," Warnock said. "I am an example and an iteration of its history, of its pain and its promise, of the brutality and the possibility. But because this is America, because we always have a path to make our country greater against unspeakable odds, here we stand together. Thank you, Georgia."

Joe Biden called Warnock to congratulate him, describing his victory as a defeat of Republican extremism and Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" philosophy.

"Tonight Georgia voters stood up for our democracy, rejected Ultra MAGAism, and most importantly: sent a good man back to the Senate," the president said on Twitter.

▲ *Supporters cheer at a Warnock election night party in Atlanta. Photograph: Jim Lo Scalzo/EPA*

Walker conceded, acknowledging that his campaign had fallen short and expressing gratitude to his team. The Republican explicitly thanked election officials who ensured the runoff was managed effectively, quelling concerns he might refuse to accept the result.

"I don't want any of you to stop believing in America," Walker told supporters. "I want you to believe in America and continue to believe in the constitution and believe in our elected officials … Always, always cast your vote no matter whatever is happening."

Walker's loss came a month after the national midterm elections, when neither he nor Warnock secured enough support to win outright, thus requiring the runoff. The runoff was just the latest in a series of very close races in Georgia, reflecting the state's relatively new status as a toss-up after decades of being considered safely Republican.

Nearly 2 million Georgians cast ballots before election day, and those early voters appeared to significantly favor Warnock. Republicans were counting on a strong election day turnout, but Walker's support on Tuesday was not enough to get him across the line.

The race had been upended several times by controversy surrounding Walker, a former University of Georgia and NFL football player who won the Republican primary after receiving Trump's endorsement.

Multiple women previously in relationships with Walker accused him of pressuring them to have abortions, despite his staunch anti-abortion views. In the final weeks of the runoff, Walker also faced questions over reports that he received a tax break intended for primary residences on his home in Texas.

Walker's defeat will probably intensify questions over Trump's standing in the Republican party. Overall, Trump-endorsed candidates fared poorly in this election season, prompting questions from some of the former president's critics over whether he has pushed his party to an unpopular extreme.

Walker's failure will be particularly worrisome for Trump given that Republicans swept other top statewide races in Georgia. Two of those candidates, the incumbent governor, Brian Kemp, and secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, attracted Trump's ire for pushing back against his efforts to overturn Biden's 2020 victory, the first time a Democrat took Georgia since 1992.

Before the result was called, the former Republican congressman Will Hurd said on Twitter: "If Walker loses tonight, it will be the *sixth time in a row* a Democrat beat Trump or a Trump-endorsed statewide candidate in Georgia. It's time to move on, build the future with conservative principles, and get rid of the crazy bullshit."

Some rightwing leaders suggested the runoff result raised questions about Trump's hopes of recapturing the White House, after he announced a third consecutive presidential bid last month.

"Conservatives across the country are tired of losing," Bob Vander Plaats, president of the group the Family Leader, said on Twitter. "#2024 is key to winning the future again. #ChooseWell."

The runoff did not determine control of the Senate, as Democrats had already won enough seats to maintain their hold for two years.

But Warnock's victory does give Democrats a crucial 51st seat, allowing them to abandon their current power-sharing agreement with Republicans. A 51- to 49-seat majority will also provide some wiggle room when it comes to close committee votes and nomination fights. That new dynamic could make the Senate majority leader, Chuck Schumer, less reliant on centrists like Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona to pass legislation and confirm nominees.

The fortified majority could also help Democrats offer a counterweight to investigations expected to be launched by House Republicans, who took the majority in the lower chamber after the midterms last month. Now that they have a clear majority in the Senate, Democrats will be able to issue subpoenas without Republican support.

"51!" Schumer said in a joyous tweet. He later added: "Senator Warnock's well-earned victory is a victory for Georgia, and a victory for democracy and against MAGA Republican extremist policies."

Apple announces new security and privacy measures amid surge in cyber-attacks

Johana Bhuiyan

Apple announced a suite of security and privacy improvements on Wednesday that the company is pitching as a way to help people protect their data from hackers, including one that civil liberty and privacy advocates have long pushed for.

The tech giant will soon allow users to choose to secure more of the data backed up to their iCloud using end-to-end encryption, which means no one but the user will be able to access that information.

Apple says the changes will help users protect their digital lives from hackers in the exceptional case that an advanced state actor was able to breach the company servers. But privacy advocates like Albert Fox Cahn, founder of the Surveillance Technology Oversight Project, say these changes may have a more immediate effect on the types of user data law enforcement and government agencies can get from Apple.

▲ *Companies such as Apple have become an increasingly appealing entity for hackers and law enforcement alike. Photograph: Yves Herman/Reuters*

These changes "acknowledge the massive public backlash against expanded spying on our devices", particularly in the aftermath of the supreme court's reversal of federal abortion protections, he said.

"This type of protection is most valuable in protecting against not cyber criminals, but people who are abusing government power to force the company to hand over data," Cahn said. "Apple has long been in the position where it's had to be the long arm of the police for years. Their law enforcement manual shows dozens of ways that they can help with investigations and now for people who opt into the protection [feature], there will be a safeguard going forward."

▲ *A screenshot of the user interface for a new Apple security feature. Photograph: Apple*

That might be a cause of concern

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for government agencies looking to get a hold of user data to aid in their investigations. Apple declined to comment on whether the company has discussed the changes with law enforcement or government agencies.

Companies such as Apple have become an increasingly appealing entity for hackers and law enforcement alike due to the vast amounts of information they hold about people. Recent years have brought a spike in global-cyber attacks and data breaches. In the first quarter of 2022, there were 404 publicly reported data breaches, up 14% from the same quarter in the previous year, according to a report from the Identity Theft Resource Center (ITRC). There was a 68% total increase in data breaches between 2020 and 2021.

The number of law enforcement and government requests for data that Apple has received has also increased, according to the company's latest transparency report. Between January and July 2021, the company received more than 12,000 requests for various types of user information, up from more than 10,000 in the last six months of 2020.

The end-to-end encryption of user information stored on iCloud, which Apple is calling "advanced data protection for iCloud", will first be rolled out to a small subset of test users before launching widely in the US before the end of the year and globally in 2023.The new offering will mean information such as messages that are backed up to iCloud,notes and photoswould be fully encrypted.

The change will not cover all data, however – contacts, calendar information, and email will not be encrypted – and users will have to voluntarily opt into the feature. The encryption key, or the code used to gain access to that secure data, will be stored on the device. That means that if a user who opts into this protection loses access to their account, they will be responsible for using their key to regain that access – Apple will no longer store the encryption keys in iCloud.

The feature not being turned on for all users by default remains a point of contention for privacy advocates.

"I'm less critical of Apple for [not encrypting contacts, calendar information and email] just given how hard it would be to cut off so many email programs and calendar tools," Cahn said. "But I do think that having a transition to privacy by default for iCloud is the most important step."

The company says that it made these features opt-in because the system requires users to be responsible for the encryption keys and other means to regain and recover access to that information. "If you lose access to your account, only you can recover this data, using your device passcode or password, recovery contact, or recovery key," according to Apple's website.

In addition to iCloud data protection, Apple plans to roll out a physical security key system for people signing into their iCloud account on any new device. It acts as a hardware-based two-factor authentication system. For those who opt to use this additional layer of security, they will be required to plug a physical security key into the charging port on the phones to verify their identity when they sign into their iCloud account on a new device.

However, users who choose to use this to protect their iCloud accounts will be responsible for holding onto those security keys – the main key and a backup.

Lastly, the company is rolling out a code system that allows people to verify that their messages are only going to the intended recipient and not being compromised by a hacker. The process may be familiar to users of the encrypted messaging app Signal. In Apple's case, two people who've enabled the system will be able to exchange their unique code and their devices will automatically detect whether someone with a different code has entered the conversation. Automatic alerts will pop up in conversations between users who have enabled this verification feature "if an exceptionally advanced adversary, such as a state-sponsored attacker, were ever to succeed breaching cloud servers and inserting their own device to eavesdrop on these encrypted communications", the company said in the news release announcing the products.

Virginia restaurant cancels reservation of anti-LGBTQ+ organization

Gloria Oladipo

▲ *Metzger Bar and Butchery announced its decision in a post on Instagram. Photograph: The Washington Post/Getty Images*

A Virginia restaurant canceled a reservation for an event hosted by a conservative organization, citing the nonprofit's condemnation of same-sex marriage and abortion rights.

Metzger Bar and Butchery, a German-inspired eatery in Richmond, canceled the booking made by the Family Foundation.

The anti-LGBTQ+ group had planned to use the restaurant for a dessert reception, the Washington Post reported.

Metzger announced its decision last Friday, writing in an Instagram post that the Family Foundation "seeks to deprive women and LGBTQ+ persons of their basic human rights in Virginia".

The restaurant said it had "always refused service to anyone for making our staff uncomfortable or unsafe and this is the driving force behind our decision.

"Many of our staff are women and/or members of the LGBTQ+ community. All our staff are people with rights who deserve dignity and a safe work environment."

Metzger is co-owned by Brittanny Anderson, who has appeared on cooking competition shows like Top Chef and Chopped.

The Family Foundation accused the restaurant of canceling the reservation an hour before the event because of their political beliefs.

In a blogpost titled "We've Been Canceled! Again", the group's president, Victoria Cobb, compared the refusal to accommodate the event to businesses refusing to serve Black customers decades ago.

"Welcome to the 21st century, where people who likely consider themselves 'progressives' attempt to recreate an environment from the 1950s and early 60s, when people were denied food service due to their race," Cobb wrote.

Responses to the restaurant's decision were mostly positive, commenters sharing their support, the Charlotte Observer reported.

"I'm proud of your decision. Can't wait for my next opportunity to dine with you," wrote one social media user.

"Bravo," wrote another.

Arizona man accused of child abuse as leader of polygamous cult, FBI says

Richard Luscombe

▲ *Family and followers of Samuel Bateman gather around as he calls from police custody following his arrest in Colorado City, Arizona, in September. Photograph: Trent Nelson/AP*

Federal investigators in Arizona discovered that a man arrested in August for kidnapping was head of a polygamous religious cult and had at least 20 "wives", most of them children.

Samuel Rappylee Bateman, an erstwhile member of the Mormon Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, set up an offshoot sect and persuaded male followers to surrender their wives and daughters, court papers filed in Flagstaff said.

Bateman, 46, of Colorado City, would beat those who did not greet him as a prophet, the FBI indictment alleges. He is also alleged to have engaged in child sex trafficking with the assistance of several of his wives.

The agency says Bateman insisted it was "Heavenly Father's will" that he engage in sex acts with them. An FBI special agent, Dawn Martin said in the affidavit it was Bateman's position that the girls had "sacrificed their virtue for the Lord".

Three women, Naomi Bistline, Donnae Barlow and Moretta Rose Johnson, are accused of kidnapping, with two scheduled to appear in magistrates court in Flagstaff on Wednesday. Johnson, 19, is awaiting extradition from Washington state.

They are accused of taking flight with eight of Bateman's children, who were placed in the care of Arizona authorities earlier this year but found last week hundreds of miles away in

▲ *Samuel Bateman. Photograph: AP*

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Spokane, Washington, according to CBS News.

Sheriff's deputies rescued the girls in an Airbnb rental property, Arizona's CBS5 said. Court documents allege Bateman and his co-conspirators transported the girls from Nebraska to Arizona, Utah and Nevada for sex acts.

One of the underage girls reportedly told authorities she was naked in the presence of an orgy Bateman had with "many other girls".

So far Bateman, who was arrested in August when somebody spotted a child's fingers poking through the gap of a trailer he was driving through Flagstaff, faces charges relating to destruction of evidence, each carrying up to 20 years in prison.

But the details contained in the court papers suggest more charges are likely.

Bateman is being held in Florence, Arizona. The FBI, and the Arizona department of child safety, declined to comment, CBS said.

Detectives have spent at least three months on the case, allegedly discovering that Bateman appointed himself head of the small cult and was engaged in child sex trafficking and polygamy.

He declared himself a prophet in 2019, in the style of the fundamentalist sect leader Warren Jeffs, who was imprisoned for life in 2011 for crimes including polygamist marriages to girls as young as 12. Bateman and his followers referred to Jeffs as "Uncle Warren", the FBI indictment states.

The official Mormon church broke with the practice of polygamy in 1890, under pressure from the US government which made renouncing the practice a condition of granting statehood to Utah. Polygamist Mormons refused to renounce plural marriages.

'The metaverse will be our slow death!' Is Facebook losing its $100bn gamble on virtual reality?

Steve Rose

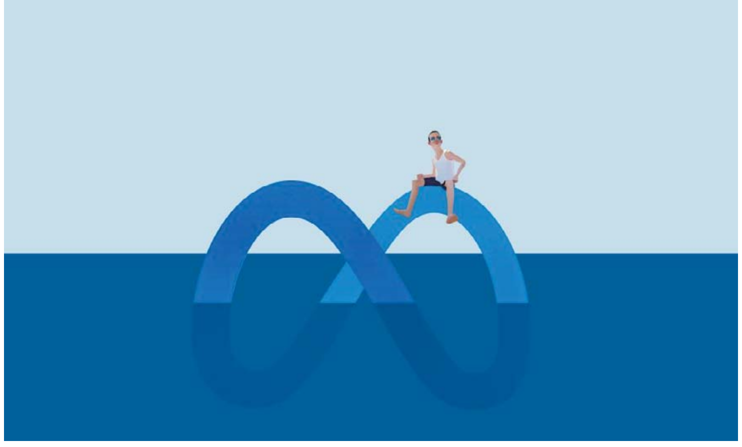
What a difference a year makes. Last October, Facebook supremo Mark Zuckerberg could barely wait to show the world what he was up to. "Today, we're going to talk about the metaverse," he enthused in a slick video presentation. "I want to share what we imagine is possible." Transitioning almost seamlessly from his real self into a computer-generated avatar, Zuckerberg guided us through his vision for the virtual-reality future: playing poker in space with your buddies; sharing cool stuff; having work meetings and birthday parties with people on the other side of the world; customising your avatar (the avatars had no legs, which was weird). Zuckerberg was so all-in on the metaverse, he even rechristened his company Meta.

This month, we saw a more subdued Zuckerberg on display: "I wanna say upfront that I take full responsibility for this decision," he told employees morosely. "This was ultimately my call and it was one of the hardest calls that I've had to make in the 18 years of running the company." Meta was laying off 11,000 people – 13% of its workforce. Poor third-quarter results had seen Meta's share price drop by 25%, wiping $80bn off the company's value. Reality Labs, Meta's metaverse division, had lost $3.7bn in the past three months, with worse expected to come. It wasn't all bad news, though: Zuckerberg announced last month that Meta avatars would at last be getting legs.

After decades of spectacular "move fast and break things" growth, Zuckerberg's empire is now looking a little fragile. Meta's share price has fallen by more than 70% this year. Moneyspinners Facebook and Instagram are losing market share and Gen Z users to fresher rivals like TikTok and Snapchat. Apple's changes to data privacy last year also decimated revenues – its introduction of an "ask not to track" option on iPhones has effectively starved Facebook of the lucrative data it uses to target ads.

Meanwhile, Meta has invested a staggering $100bn on metaverse research and development to date, $15bn in the past year alone – with apparently little to show for it. Zuckerberg's newfound metaverse obsession could be seen as a preemptive virtual land grab for what is generally agreed to be the future of the internet.

It could also represent an attempted second act, for both the 38-year-old



Composite: Guardian Design/AFP/Getty/Reuters

and his somewhat tarnished Facebook brand. But the markets seem to be saying "count us out", and according to reports, just 58% of Meta's own employees said they understood the company's metaverse vision. Comments on the latest lay-offs in an anonymous employee survey included, "the metaverse will be our slow death" and "Mark Zuckerberg will single-handedly kill a company with the metaverse".

If nothing else, Zuckerberg has popularised the term "metaverse", even if he didn't invent it, and definitions of what it means vary. Zuckerberg explained it as "an embodied internet where you're in the experience, not just looking at it". Rather than our current 2D, screen-based internet, in other words, the metaverse will be a 3D virtual space, accessed by either a VR headset or AR (augmented reality) glasses, which superimpose a layer of digital information on top of the visible world.

Matthew Ball, tech investor and author of The Metaverse: How It Will Revolutionise Everything, defines the metaverse as "a massively scaled and interoperable network of real-time rendered 3D virtual worlds", with individual presence and continuity of data. He has to explain it less and less, he says: "A year ago, it was mostly 'what is the metaverse?' Questions now are a lot more practical: what will be here? When? For whom? How, and why?"

The "why" is a particularly good question when it comes to Meta. "You're going to be able to do almost anything you can imagine," said Zuckerberg in his intro video last year. "Get together with friends and family, work, learn, play, shop, create …"

At the time we were just coming out of the pandemic. Remote working, video calling and e-commerce had suddenly become the norm. "Many people predicted this would be a permanent acceleration that would continue even after the pandemic ended," Zuckerberg said in a recent staff email. "I did, too, so I made the decision to significantly increase our investments. Unfortunately, this did not play out the way I expected." Post-pandemic, it turned out people still preferred meeting face to face or on a video call to donning a clunky VR headset and dragging your legless avatar into a virtual meeting room.

It has been a similar story on the leisure side. Meta's Quest VR headsets are the market leader, but most buyers are not using them to flock to Meta's principal app, Horizon Worlds – which the company describes as "a synchronous social network where creators can build engaging worlds". Meta set a target of 500,000 Horizon Worlds users by the end of 2022; the current figure is nearer 200,000 – down from 300,000 in February, which suggests many first-time visitors are not returning. It has been criticised for programming bugs, instability, rudimentary graphics and a general sense of boredom.

From my own visits to Horizon Worlds, the 3D motion and audio were fine but the graphics were basic, often garish and textureless: a good two decades behind today's best video games. The feeling is of a sparsely attended trade fair.

Many of Horizon Worlds' activities felt more like demonstrations: in a perfunctory wild west town, you can shoot a virtual bottle in a virtual saloon with your virtual pistol (with unsatisfyingly lo-fi results) and ride a hobby horse (literally a virtual horse's head on a broomstick). At the Marvel superheroes world, you can try on various costumes that enable you to fly or shoot lightning bolts, and that's about it. There were few people in either the social "hangout" areas or the "games" section, and most of the strangers I encountered seemed to be American children. One had the avatar and voice of a 10-year-old girl.

Not even the people making Horizon Worlds have embraced it. Memos leaked in October appeared to show the Meta vice-president, Vishal Shah, urging staff to use their own products more. "If we don't love it, how can we expect our users to love it?" Shah wrote. "Everyone in this organisation should make it their mission to fall in love with Horizon Worlds. You can't do that without using it. Get in there."

Meanwhile, direct competitors such as VRChat and Rec Room are thriving. "It's pretty clear they are offering something that Meta doesn't," says veteran games designer Raph Koster, namely better avatars, a wider choices of games and, critically, bigger crowds (Rec Room has an estimated three million monthly users). "Next to those, Meta looks relatively sterile and empty. There's just a lack of sufficient entertainment in there."

Horizon World's numbers are dwarfed by those of online games (most of which are accessible with and without VR headsets). Fortnite attracts 250 million active players a month. Gaming platform Roblox has more 200 million visitors a month and Minecraft 170 million (two-thirds of whom are under 16 – the exact demographic that is turning away from Facebook and other social media).

"Historically, we've seen that game worlds generally don't have any trouble attracting an audience," says Koster. This is not a revelation. "Bars with a jukebox or a pool table tend to do better than bars without anything. It doesn't change because you digitise the experience."

Unlike Meta, the games industry began with the "why?" It was building complex, sophisticated, popular virtual worlds – proto-metaverses – long before the idea caught Zuckerberg's eye. As such, it is well positioned for a slice of the metaverse pie. Epic Games, for example, whose Unreal game engine (think of it as the "brain" of the game; the software framework that builds the reality in real time) powers not only its bestselling Fortnite but hundreds of other games and applications, making it attractive to independent metaverse-builders.

In April, Sony and Lego invested $2bn in Epic's metaverse vision. In January, Microsoft moved to acquire another games giant, Activision Blizzard, makers of World of Warcraft, Overwatch, Call of Duty and Candy Crush, for nearly $70bn (the deal is currently under antitrust review).

Having sprung out of social net-

Mark Zuckerberg speaking to his digital self. Photograph: Facebook/Reuters

works like Facebook, Meta's model is based on "an attention economy, not a fulfilment economy", says Herman Narula, head of the British tech company Improbable. Social media prioritises keeping users passively engaged for as long as possible, whereas gaming seeks to provide fulfilling, active experiences.

"There's a difference between watching an experience and having an experience," he says. "If you look at games like Fortnite and Minecraft … what matters is presence; how many things can you do? In Minecraft, you can move anything about it, you can modify the laws, you can be creative. So what matters is creating a highly creative environment, which allows the normal self-expression."

Improbable's website claims "we are the metaverse technology company". Among other things (it works with military as well as gaming companies), the company, which Narula co-founded in 2012, is working on connecting various metaverses together, and hosting large numbers of people in virtual worlds. Whereas most multiplayer online games, like Fortnite, never really put more than 100 people together on one server, Improbable has hosted events bringing together 30,000 people in the same virtual space.

Unsurprisingly, Narula is optimistic about the metaverse. In his recent book Virtual Society, he writes: "Like the development of writing, or the advent of the computer age, the dawn of the metaverse will be a grand pivot point in the history of humanity."

The metaverse was valued at nearly $23bn last year and is expected to grow nearly 40% a year for the rest of the decade. As the Epic co-founder and CEO Tim Sweeney put it last year: "The next three years are going to be critical for all of the metaverse-aspiring companies like Epic, Roblox, Microsoft, Facebook [Meta]. It's kind of a race to get to a billion users. Whoever brings on a billion users first would be the presumed leader in setting the standards."

The building blocks of the meta-

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verse are coming together, and Meta is working on many of them: hardware like VR and AR devices, data and network infrastructure, social platforms and interfaces, developer and creator ecosystems – all of which require skilled people (in Meta's recent 11,000-person cull, Reality Labs was relatively unscathed).

"We are creating a new category that requires significantly and abundantly more resources than it takes to create a single product or collection of products," says a Meta spokesperson. "It's misguided to categorise our long-term investment as a loss while we are within our initial phases of development." So no more "move fast and break things"; now it's more of a "move slowly and build things" vibe.

From the outset, Zuckerberg said the metaverse would take five to 10 years to arrive, though some, such as Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella, are saying it is here already. Matthew Ball agrees: "We have hundreds of millions interacting in 3D virtual worlds each day," he says, pointing to the likes of Roblox and Minecraft.

But it goes beyond gaming: "Johns Hopkins University hospital is now performing surgery with XR [as in "extended reality" – VR and AR] devices and game engines, while Vancouver airport runs a 3D simulation [a "digital twin" of the airport, incorporating real-time information which can be used for training, optimisation, future planning, simulation and testing] and similarly Tesla cars are building a live simulation of San Francisco using Unreal. The pieces are more mature than many give credit, but we've yet to develop the standards and systems to integrate them in the ways the internet is developed today."

It is unlikely that Meta, or any other big tech company, will "own" the metaverse, says Ball. "We often misrepresent the control of big tech," he says, pointing out that the "Big Five" – Google, Apple, Meta, Amazon and Microsoft – together collect less than 10% of digital revenues, "although they exert disproportionate influence over the rest of the internet … It is likely that a similar outcome happens with the metaverse: a handful of vertically and horizontally integrated software and hardware giants amass the substantial share of users, data, revenue, devices, etc, and exert even greater influence. The metaverse is likely to grow big tech's reach, not shrink it."

If Meta does succeed in controlling a substantial slice of the metaverse, though, there are further, deeper concerns. The charge sheet against social media in general, and Facebook/Meta in particular, is extensive: disseminating and amplifying online disinformation and hate speech, unseen and undisclosed political influence, its impact on mental health, the collection and misuse of personal data.

"Whatever company owns the metaverse will have better information about crime, better surveillance, better everything than the government will," says Koster. He points out how much of our lives is already online: our personal records, our résumés, our bank accounts, our friendships, our online movements and behaviours. The metaverse will enable access to even more layers of data: "A lot of the folks who work on the hardware for AR glasses, for example, are concerned about the fact that the glasses can read biometrics off your iris, and that tells them an enormous amount about your medical state, your emotions moment to moment. Virtual worlds are panopticons. The more we digitise the world, that's the power we're handing over to whoever runs that metaverse."

Meta is taking pains to assuage such fears. "The metaverse is a collective project," says a spokesperson, "and how to responsibly manage the new types of data that companies may collect is exactly the kind of challenge that needs collaboration and discussion. It's not up to any one company to set the rules on this."

All are in agreement that regulation is needed, but judging by how well the internet has been governed so far, the outlook is complicated – potentially liberating; potentially downright dystopian.

Sean Spicer confuses Pearl Harbor anniversary with D-day

Martin Pengelly in New York

▲ *Last year, Sean Spicer said that President Joe Biden failed to acknowledge D-day. Photograph: Charles Sykes/Invision/AP*

Sean Spicer, Donald Trump's first White House press secretary and a Harvard politics fellow, came under fire on Wednesday for a tweet in which he appeared to confuse one major second world war anniversary for another.

Spicer wrote: "Today is Dday [sic]. It only lives in infamy if we remember and share the story of sacrifice with the next generation. #DDay."

7 December is indeed an important second world war anniversary – that of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, which brought the US into the war.

Pearl Harbor has been called many things, including most famously "a date which will live in infamy" by the then president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

But not D-day. That was 6 June 1944, when allied navies sent forces ashore in France, the start of the end of the war against Nazi Germany.

Pearl Harbor was primarily an attack on the US navy. According to US government figures, 2,008 members of the navy were killed, along with 218 members of the army, 109 marines and 68 civilians. Nineteen ships were destroyed or damaged.

According to his own website, Spicer "holds a master's degree in national security and strategic studies from the US Naval War College [and] has served over 20 years in the US navy reserve and is currently a commander". He specialises in public affairs.

On Wednesday, amid a minor PR nightmare and Twitter storm, Spicer deleted his D-day tweet and said: "Sorry. Apologies."

Undeleted was a tweet from 2021 in which Spicer showed he knew when D-day was and was happy to use that knowledge to attack Joe Biden, writing: "Yesterday was the anniversary of #DDay – no mention of it from the president. The White House press secretary says he might get around to it."

Biden was widely attacked from the right for not formally marking D-day last year.

But as the fact-checking website Snopes put it: "While neither Biden himself nor the White House, as such, publicly commemorated the 77th anniversary of D-day in 2021, Vice-President Kamala Harris and first lady Jill Biden both did."

Furthermore, "in his speech at Arlington National Cemetery on Memorial Day, 31 May, Biden briefly alluded to the D-day landings, saying: 'Here in Arlington lie heroes who gave what President Lincoln called 'the last full measure of devotion'. They did not only die at Gettysburg or in Flanders Fields or on the beaches of Normandy, but in the mountains of Afghanistan, the deserts of Iraq in the last 20 years'."

On Wednesday, the Associated Press said a "dwindling number" of Pearl Harbor veterans returned to Hawaii to mark the 81st anniversary of the Japanese attack.

Ira Schab, 102, was on the USS Dobbin as a tuba player in the ship's band. He remembered seeing Japanese planes flying overhead and wondering what to do.

"We had no place to go and hoped they'd miss us," he said, also describing how he fed ammunition to machine gunners on the vessel, which was not hit.

Of the remembrance ceremony, Schab said: "I wouldn't miss it because I got an awful lot of friends that are still here that are buried here. I come back out of respect for them.

"Remember what they're here for. Remember and honor those that are left. They did a hell of a job. Those who are still here, dead or alive."

Associated Press contributed reporting

More women accuse US doctor who died by suicide of raping them while they were sedated

Ramon Antonio Vargas

A doctor in Florida who recently died by suicide after being arrested on allegations that he drugged and raped two patients is now accused of similarly attacking at least three other women under his care.

As of Tuesday, five patients of Eric Salata's Pura Vida cosmetic surgery clinic in Naples had gone to police there and reported that the physician had either sexually assaulted them or attempted to during medical procedures, Adam Horowitz, an attorney for one of the women, said on Tuesday.

Horowitz added that the five women had filed about 11 police reports in total accusing Salata.

The latest allegations against Salata came about eight days after his body was found in a woodland. Investigators determined he had shot himself while out on bond a week after police arrested him on suspicion of raping two of his patients while they were unconscious.

Officers alleged that Salata incapacitated one of the patients – aged 51 – with laughing gas, the anti-anxiety medication Xanax and tequila, which the doctor claimed were forms of pain relief for the procedure she had hired him to perform.

The other of those surgical patients, who was 72, reported that Salata raped her – leaving her lip bruised – after

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administering laughing gas to her.

Naples police arrested Salata on 21 November, after which he was released on bond. A third woman with similar allegations against Salata then came forward after his arrest made the news.

On 28 November, deputies with the sheriff's office in Collier county – which includes Naples – responded to a request to check on Salata after he left his home leaving behind two notes, his wedding ring and his credit cards, according to a police report obtained by WINK-TV.

That report redacted the notes' contents. But deputies ultimately went to the last known location of Salata, who was wearing an ankle monitor that a judge had ordered to track his movements while he was out on bond. There, authorities said they found his corpse in a ditch next to a gun.

▲ Naples, Florida, where Eric Salata's Pura Vida clinic was located. Photograph: EQRoy/

Investigators have since said they determined that Salata had intentionally shot himself in the head.

Word of Salata's growing number of victims on Tuesday came after his arrest and subsequent suicide landed in news headlines across the US.

Salata was scheduled for a court appearance on 19 December on the two counts of sexual battery to a physically helpless person with which he had been booked. He could have faced between six and 30 years in prison for either of those charges if convicted.

At least one of Salata's accusers had sued Pura Vida for damages by Tuesday, the local outlet WFTX-TV reported.

Pura Vida's website was no longer online, and calls to the clinic's phone number were going directly to voicemail. Last week, a recording on the clinic's voicemail said the facility had closed indefinitely.

The cosmetic surgeon's downfall follows that of neurologist Ricardo Cruciani, who killed himself in a New York City jail in August while awaiting sentencing for his conviction on charges that he had sexually abused patients. Cruciani, who maintained his innocence, faced a maximum punishment of life imprisonment.

In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is at 800-273-8255 and online chat is also available. You can also text HOME to 741741 to connect with a crisis text line counselor. A list of prevention resources can be found here.

In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org.

▲ Eric Salata. Photograph: Naples Police Department

San Francisco lawmakers vote to ban killer robots in drastic U-turn

Sam Levin in Los Angeles

San Francisco lawmakers voted to ban police robots from using deadly force on Tuesday, reversing course one week after officials had approved the practice and sparked national outrage.

The city's board of supervisors voted to explicitly prohibit the San Francisco police department (SFPD) from using the 17 robots in its arsenal to kill people. The board, however, also sent the issue back to a committee for further review, which means it could later decide to allow lethal force in some circumstances.

The U-turn came after the majority of members on the 11-person board had voted last week to allow robots to be armed with explosives and use them to kill people "when risk of loss of life to members of the public or officers is imminent and outweighs any other force option available to SFPD". The board had also added an amendment saying that only high-ranking officers would be allowed to authorize deadly force.

The initial decision to allow "killer robots" was met with widespread criticism from civil rights groups and shone a harsh light on the increasing militarization of US police forces.

▲ A woman holds up a sign while taking part in a protest about the use of robots by the SFPD. Photograph: Jeff Chiu/AP

Supervisors and police officials who had originally supported the use of lethal force had said the robots would kill people only in extraordinary cases, such as suicide bombing or active shooter situations.

Hilary Ronen, one of three supervisors who originally voted against deploying killer robots, said at last week's meeting: "I'm surprised that we're here in 2022. We have seen a history of these leading to tragedy and destruction all over the world." After Tuesday's reversal, she tweeted: "Common sense prevailed."

The new policy does allow SFPD to use robots for situational awareness, such as sending the equipment into dangerous situations while officers stay behind.

On Monday, supervisor Gordon Mar tweeted that he regretted voting in favor of lethal robots and said he'd be switching his position: "Even with additional guardrails, I've grown increasingly uncomfortable with our vote & the precedent it sets for other cities without as strong a commitment to police accountability. I do not think making state violence more remote, distanced, & less human is a step forward.

"I do not think robots with lethal force will make us safer, or prevent or solve crimes," he added.

San Francisco police have a controversial history of using lethal force against civilians, and one former officer is now facing manslaughter charges for an on-duty killing.

SFPD chief William Scott defended the department's push to allow robots to kill people, saying in a statement on Wednesday: "We cannot be limited in how we are able to respond if and when the worst-case scenario incident occurs in San Francisco." He said the department was interested in "having the tools necessary to prevent loss of innocent lives in an active shooter or mass casualty incident", adding that "part of our job is to prepare for the unthinkable".

Scott continued, "We want to use our robots to save lives – not take them. To be sure, this is about neutralizing a threat by equipping a robot with a lethal option as a last case scenario, not sending an officer in on a suicide mission."

The Associated Press contributed reporting

Cristina Fernández may not go to jail but verdict upends Argentina's politics

Amy Booth in Buenos Aires

For decades, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner dominated Argentina's political landscape: as a senator, first lady, president and then vice-president. But on Tuesday she was sentenced to six years in prison in a verdict, which if upheld on appeal, will also ban her from holding public office for the rest of her life.

Fernández immediately announced that she would not run for president, or any other kind of elected office, in the 2023 elections. The court's ruling appeared to have abruptly sidelined the country's most powerful – and most polarising – politician since Juan and Eva Perón, leaving many Argentinians wondering: what will come next?

Currently, Fernández enjoys immunity from arrest because of her role as senator and vice-president, and she cannot legally be sent to jail until she has exhausted her appeals – a process which could take years.

The judges who found her guilty of defrauding the state will explain how they arrived at their decision at a hearing on 9 March. At that point Fernández will be able to appeal her conviction, first at the federal criminal cassation chamber and then at the supreme court.

María Esperanza Casullo, professor of political science at Argentina's National University of Río Negro, said that Fernández was unlikely to spend any time behind bars: the trials and appeals process against recent presidents such as Carlos Menem and Fernando de la Rua took well over a decade. Furthermore, Argentinian prisoners can request to serve the rest of their sentences under house arrest when they turn 70. Fernández de Kirchner is currently 69.

Casullo also highlighted a number of points of controversy in the trial. Argentina's political system does not automatically impose a lifetime ban on seeking office for this kind of conviction, and in other recent cases, such

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bans have been for a set period of years. "It seems somewhat disproportionate," she said.

She also highlighted a recent leak which allegedly showed that a judge investigating the case was among several members of the judiciary and prominent businessmen who were flown by private jet to the Patagonian ranch of the British business magnate Joe Lewis, a friend of the rightwing former president – and bitter Fernández foe – Mauricio Macri.

Meanwhile, Fernández's announcement that she will not seek public office in 2023 has wide-reaching implications for the nation's electoral scenario. Argentina is due to hold general elections in November 2023, and she was widely expected to run for the presidency.

Argentina's current president, Alberto Fernández (no relation to Fernández de Kirchner), served as chief of staff during the 2003-2007 presidency of Fernández de Kirchner's husband, Néstor Kirchner, and the early days of the Cristina presidency, before breaking with her amid a dispute over agricultural export taxes.

It came as a surprise to many when Cristina announced that Alberto would be the presidential candidate and she his running mate in the 2019 presidential elections, given the pair's differences and his less prominent political profile.

Amid a worsening economic panorama, deep divides have emerged in their Frente de Todos coalition this year over issues including a March deal to renegotiate a large sovereign debt owed to the IMF. While Alberto has pursued a market-calming, conciliatory strategy, Cristina has pushed for a more hardline approach to the Washington-based lender.

Fernández was president of Argentina between 2007 and 2015, after her husband Néstor left office. Argentina enjoyed growth rates of around 8% per year in the early 2000s, buoyed in part by high commodities prices, and boasted the highest national minimum wage in Latin America. This enabled Kirchnerism to implement a series of policies that favoured the country's poor, such as providing pensions for housewives, creating a universal child benefit, and opening new public universities.

But she had a fractious relationship and a series of political tussles with agribusiness groups, the judiciary and the mass media.

"She embodied a spirit of redistributive policies … and confrontation with powerful sectors," Casullo said.

▲ *A supporter of Argentina's Vice-President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner kisses her image on a banner hung outside a courthouse in Buenos Aires. Photograph: Luis Robayo/AFP/Getty Images*

Romany leaders appeal for calm after second day of protest violence in Greece

Helena Smith in Athens

Romany leaders in Greece have appealed for calm following a second day of violent protests triggered by the police shooting of a teenage boy, who is in intensive care.

Outrage over the incident, which took place in Thessaloniki when the 16-year-old reportedly sped out of a petrol station without paying a €20 fuel bill, has resulted in thousands spilling on to the streets and clashes erupting in major urban centres.

"We have to be restrained," said Panayiotis Sambanis, who heads the country's Federation of Roma. "I am appealing to everyone to calm down."

At least 10 police officers were reported injured in what were described as riots in Athens and Thessaloniki as protesters also marked the 6 December anniversary of the fatal police shooting of Alexandros Grigoropoulos, another teenager, in 2008.

Greece's civil protection minister said the shooting this week of the Romany boy, identified as Kostas Frangoulis, was being investigated and "everyone should respect that".

"Yesterday's attacks and the injuries sustained by police officers must be unanimously condemned," said Takis Theodorikakos, who is in charge of public order. "We support the police but always [adhering] strictly within the framework of the law. The law is for everyone without exception."

Frangoulis has been hospitalised in critical condition after being shot in the head when a motorised police division, alerted to the incident by the petrol station owner, responded by chasing his pickup truck.

The officer, who acknowledged pulling the trigger and has since been suspended, faces charges of attempted manslaughter with possible intent and illegally using his service pistol. Appearing before a public prosecutor, the 34-year-old said his intended target was the vehicle's wheel and that he opened fire only twice after the teenager attempted to ram one of the pursuing police patrols, which put "the lives of my colleagues in danger".

The incident has not only highlighted what is widely perceived as a culture of abuse and impunity in the Greek police but incensed the Romany community, with many believing Frangoulis was deliberately targeted because he was a member of a minority ethnic group. Human rights groups have echoed that view.

In recent years a number of Romany men have been fatally shot or injured in similar chases by police.

"The only thing we want is justice," the boy's father told reporters on Wednesday. "The policeman should be punished and put inside because he shot a 16-year-old."

"I brought him up in my poverty and he was the best kid. He did what he did and we apologise," he said of his son's refusal to pay the fuel bill, "but [the policeman] should not have shot him and [tried to] kill him."

Weeks of unrest followed the killing of Grigoropoulos. His death triggered the worst riots the nation had seen in decades.

In echoes of those protests, demonstrators including many Roma waged street battles with police, hurling rocks and petrol bombs as officers responded with teargas and stun grenades.

With tensions running high, the civil protection minister cautioned against "a repeat of those terrible events", saying it was wrong to associate the two incidents.

▲ *People brandishing molotov cocktails in Thessaloniki on Tuesday. Photograph: Giannis Papanikos/AP*

UK's first new coalmine for 30 years gets go-ahead in Cumbria

Fiona Harvey Environment editor

The UK will build its first new coalmine for three decades at Whitehaven in Cumbria, despite objections locally, across the UK and from around the world.

Michael Gove, the levelling up secretary, gave the green light for the project on Wednesday, paving the way for an estimated investment of £165m that will create about 500 new jobs in the region and produce 2.8m tonnes of coking coal a year, largely for steelmaking.

The mine will also produce an estimated 400,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions a year, increasing the UK's emissions by the equivalent of putting 200,000 cars on the road.

The vast majority of the coal produced will be for export, as most UK steel producers have rejected the use of the coal, which is high in sulphur and surplus to their needs.

Where these exports will go is

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uncertain, as most European steelmakers are turning away from the use of coal and adopting green methods such as electric arc furnaces and renewable energy.

The government said the mine was possible within the UK's climate legislation, which requires the UK to reach net zero emissions by 2050, as operations will shut down by 2049.

In its report sent to Gove, the Planning Inspectorate claimed the mine would have "an overall neutral effect on climate change". This, it said, was because the likely amount of coal used in steel making would be "broadly the same with or without" it.

A government spokesperson said the coal would be used to make steel that would otherwise have been imported and not to generate power.

Ministers, however, are braced for an almost-certain legal challenge by those who say the decision risks breaching that target.

Critics said the announcement was cynically timed to placate Tory MPs unhappy with the government for ending the moratorium on new onshore wind projects, which was confirmed 24 hours before.

The shadow climate change secretary, Ed Miliband, said the mine was "no solution to the energy crisis", would not benefit British steel producers and marked "the death knell of any claims this government has to climate leadership".

The UK should instead create sustainable jobs in renewable energy, he said, adding a Labour government would make Britain "a clean energy superpower".

Zarah Sultana, Labour MP for Coventry South, said: "The Tories again show they put the fossil fuel industry before people and planet. Shameful."

▲ *People demonstrate against the proposed coalmine in Cumbria outside the Home Office in London in September 2021. Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA*

Green MP Caroline Lucas called the decision "a climate crime against humanity". She said: "Instead of backing 1000s of green jobs & sustainable, long-term economic revival, Govt has backed a climate-busting, backward-looking, stranded asset coal mine."

The decision "cancels out all the progress Britain has made on renewable energy", said Tim Farron, the former Liberal Democrat leader who is the party's environment spokesperson and a Cumbrian MP.

Environmental groups said the new mine would prove a costly and harmful mistake for the climate.

Greenpeace said the UK risked becoming "a superpower in climate hypocrisy rather than climate leadership" and that the mine would do "absolutely nothing" for the country's energy security because the coal it contains can only be used for steelmaking.

Friend of the Earth said the mine would become an "expensive stranded asset" and would not replace Russian coal.

Laura Clarke, CEO of environmental law firm Client Earth, called the decision "unforgivable". "Makes no sense in terms of the science, the economics, or indeed the UK's legally binding netzero commitments," she said.

The prime minister, Rishi Sunak, has faced down objections from green MPs within his party. The decision will be welcomed by Conservative rightwingers for whom the mine has become talismanic.

The mine's backers have been trying to get the project off the ground since 2014. It got local approval in 2020 and was greenlit by ministers in 2021. But for the past two years the project has been beset by planning delays as the government rescinded its approval as it prepared to take on the presidency of global climate talks ahead of the Cop26 UN climate summit in Glasgow in November 2021.

The UK government handed over its presidency of the UN climate negotiations last month to Egypt, a year after the widely lauded Cop26 resolved to limit global temperature rises to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, an achievement the Cop president, Alok Sharma, warned was "fragile".

A report by the International Energy Agency last year, commissioned by the UK government while Cop president, found that no new fossil fuel development – of coal, oil, or gas – could take place if the world was to remain within the 1.5C limit.

Sharma told the Observer last weekend he was firmly against the mine. He said: "Over the past three years the UK has sought to persuade other nations to consign coal to history, because we are fighting to limit global warming to 1.5C and coal is the most polluting energy source.

"A decision to open a new coalmine would send completely the wrong message and be an own goal. This proposed new mine will have no impact on reducing energy bills or ensuring our energy security."

Philip Dunne MP, the chair of the environmental audit committee, said: "Coal is the most polluting energy source, and is not consistent with the government's net zero ambitions. It is not clear-cut to suggest that having a coalmine producing coking coal for steelmaking on our doorstep will reduce steelmakers' demand for imported coal.

"On the contrary, when our committee heard from steelmakers earlier this year, they argued that they have survived long enough without UK domestic coking coal and that any purchase of coking coal from a potential site in Cumbria would be a commercial decision."

Nicholas Stern, the acclaimed economist who has worked on the climate, development and public policy, said the mine would be damaging to the UK, and the world.

"Opening a coalmine in the UK now is a serious mistake: economic, social, environmental, financial and political," Lord Stern said. "Economically, it is investing in the technologies of the last century, not this, and that is the wrong path to growth. Socially, it is pursuing jobs in industries that are on the way out, creating future job insecurity.

"Environmentally, it is adding to world supply and thus consumption of coal and releasing greenhouse gases when there is an urgent need to reduce them. And politically, it is undermining the UK's authority on the most important global issue of our times."

German police raids target group accused of far-right plot to overthrow state

Kate Connolly in Berlin and Philip Oltermann

An alleged far-right plot led by a German aristocrat to overthrow the state that sought the backing of the Russian government has been thwarted in Germany, after a series of dawn raids across the country.

Twenty-five people including a 71-year-old prince, a retired military commander, and an acting judge and former MP for the far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) were planning a violent overthrow of the state, including an armed attack on the parliament, inspired by the storming of the US Capitol, according to prosecutors.

The group was apparently driven in ideology by the deep-state conspiracy theories of QAnon and the Reichsbürger ("empire citizens") movement, which denies the right of modern Germany to exist. It was planning to renegotiate the country's post-second world war settlement, insisting the "Deutsche Reich" still had legitimacy despite having ended with the Nazis' defeat in 1945.

Nancy Faeser, Germany's interior minister, called the group the "enemies of democracy", saying it was as yet unclear as to how advanced its plans had been, or how likely it was to have succeeded.

She said the government would respond against such plots with the "full force of the law", adding: "The investigations provide a glimpse into the abyss of a terrorist threat from the Reichsbürger milieu."

Relatives of the group's alleged ringleader, Heinrich XIII, Prince Reuß von Greiz, who claims descent from a royal line that ruled for 800 years in Thuringia until the breakup of the German monarchy, told the Ostthüringer Zeitung newspaper in August he was a "bitter old man" with "crazy conspiracy theory views" who had turned his back on the family years ago. The family said it distanced itself "very clearly from his political and historical views".

Peter Frank, Germany's public prosecutor general, said the ringleaders of the group were being held in police custody. He confirmed reports that an armed wing of the group, which was meant to form the basis of a new German army and included former active members of the military, had planned to violently storm the German Bundestag or parliament.

"Those who have been arrested are supporters of conspiracy myths, from a conglomerate of narratives relating to the ideologies of the Reichsbürger and QAnon ideologies," he told reporters in Karlsruhe.

The German president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, told public radio he was "deeply concerned" by the alleged plot, describing it as a "new level".

In what is believed to have been the biggest police investigation in Germany against extremists, a surveillance team under the auspices of the federal criminal police office (BKA) and the federal public prosecutor, began monitoring 52 suspects at the start of September under the codename "Shadows", including monitoring telephones, chat groups and checking bank accounts. The operation followed a tip-off from someone in Berlin.

Investigators say they quickly established strong ideological links between the members, who included Reichsbürger, as well as members of the coronavirus denial Querdenker movement and supporters of the QAnon conspiracy theory.

The group, under the leadership of Heinrich XIII and a former commander of a paratrooper battalion, had been preparing for so-called "Day X", on which about two dozen people were to storm the Reichstag building, home to the German parliament, and to handcuff and arrest MPs and parliamentary staff in an operation taking as its example the 2021 attack on the US Capitol.

After their takeover, the group had envisioned renegotiating the treaties Germany signed after the end of the second world war. "For now, the Russian Federation was exclusively to be the central contact for these negotiations," prosecutors said.

While Heinrich XIII had made efforts to reach out to Moscow, prosecutors said: "There is no indication that the contacts reacted positively to his approach." A Russian woman named only as Vitalia B, among those arrested on Wednesday, is suspected of having facilitated those contacts, prosecutors added.

Russia's embassy in Berlin denied any Russian state involvement in the group. In a statement, it said: "Russian diplomatic and consulate offices in Germany have no contact to representatives of terrorist groups or other illegal units."

As details of the group's members emerged, they revealed what one investigator referred to as a "motley crew" – from a coronavirus-denying roofer to a gourmet cook, whose son-in-law is a professional footballer, a pilot with a German airline and a tenor who was due to be installed as culture minister after the group's takeover.

German politicians expressed their relief that the plot had been thwarted, though Sara Nanni, of the Greens, said initial indications were that the group might have lacked the means or wherewithal to carry out their plan.

"More details keep coming to light that raise doubts about whether these people were ever clever enough to plan and carry out such a coup," she said in a post on the social media network Mastadon. However, she acknowledged that "no matter how crude their ideas and how hopeless their plans", even the attempt was dangerous.

Federal prosecutors said 3,000 officers had conducted searches at 137 sites in 11 of Germany's 16 states, including a palace in the state of Thuringia, and that 22 German citizens whad been detained on suspicion of "membership in a terrorist organisation". Three other detainees, including a female Russian

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citizen, - reportedly Heinrich's romantic partner - were suspected of supporting the organisation, they said.

Der Spiegel reported that locations searched included the barracks of Germany's special forces unit, KSK, in the south-western town of Calw. The unit has in the past been scrutinised over alleged far-right involvement by some soldiers. Federal prosecutors declined to confirm or deny that the barracks was searched.

But among those arrested was a former senior field officer at the German army's paratrooper battalion, identified as 69-year-old Rüdiger von Pescatore and believed to have been a commander in Calw. He was also described as a ring leader of the group.

He and Heinrich XIII had founded a "terrorist organisation last year with the goal of overturning the existing state order in Germany", prosecutors said. The men planned to replace it with their own form of state, which was "already in the course of being founded". Von Pescatore had been in charge of planning the military coup, and Heinrich XIII with mapping out Germany's future political order.

They had even started to nominate ministers for a transitional post-coup government, according to the newspaper Die Zeit, in which one of the suspects, the former AfD MP Birgit Malsack-Winkemann, 58, a judge by profession, who was arrested at her home in the western Berlin district of Wannsee on Wednesday morning, was to be federal minister for justice.

Along with detentions in Germany, prosecutors said one person was detained in the Austrian ski-resort of Kitzbühel and another in Italy. Italian police confirmed the arrest around Wednesday lunchtime of a 64-year-old former German army officer connected to the group. He was detained in a hotel where "material pertaining to the group's subversive activity" was found, according to Italian media. The man was expected to be extradited to Germany soon.

The group was said to be convinced modern Germany was run by a "deep state" conspiracy that was about to be exposed by an alliance of German intelligence agencies and the militaries of foreign states including Russia and the US.

"Everything will be turned upside down: the current public prosecutors and judges, as well as the heads of the health departments and their superiors will find themselves in the dock at Nuremberg 2.0," one of the suspect said in a message posted on Telegram minutes before the start of Wednesday's raids, Die Zeit reported.

While the suspects believed their aims could be achieved only by military means and with force, prosecutors said, it was unclear whether the group had managed to amass any serious kind of arsenal.

Several of the accused are former members of the military and are suspected of having illegally taken weapons out of the army's stock during their years in service, while others hold arms licences.

Prince Harry asked 'Are you harming your family?' on eve of Netflix series

Caroline Davies

"So many questions," replied the Duke of Sussex, as representatives of the media shouted "Are you harming your family, Harry?" and "Are you putting money before family?" while he and the Duchess of Sussex attended a New York charity gala hosted by Alec Baldwin on Tuesday.

As Netflix prepares to stream Volume I of its Harry & Meghan tell-all docuseries on Thursday, two explosive pre-release trailers have already aired none-too-subtle hints at potential bombshells contained within the series, and provoked questions of their own.

Who is Harry accusing when he references "a hierarchy of the family ... there's leaking, but there's also planting of stories"?

What pivotal moment are the couple remarking upon when Meghan snaps her fingers, saying "And then...", and Harry completes the sentence saying: "everything changed"?

Harry's reference to "The pain and suffering of women marrying into this family, this feeding frenzy" - and how, as he prepared to wed Meghan, he felt "terrified" and "didn't want history to repeat itself" - is bound to provoke comparisons with the experience of his mother, Diana, Princess of Wales.

And then there is his ominous-sounding statement: "No one knows the full truth. We know the full truth."

None of it appears to bode well for the Royals of Buckingham Palace, who, by remarkable coincidence, were out in glittering force, freighted with tiaras, at a white-tie diplomatic reception at the palace, just as the Sussexes were being feted at the black tie Ripple of Hope New York gala for their activism on racial justice and mental health.

▲ Media representatives shouted questions at Prince Harry, the Duke of Sussex, and his wife, Duchess Meghan Markle, as the arrived at the Ripple of Hope Award Gala in New York. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty Images

The King, the Queen Consort and the Prince and Princess of Wales may have been all smiles in public, but it seems unlikely they are not braced for further provocative and damaging claims arising from the docuseries.

Judging from previous projects by Liz Garbus, the Oscar-nominated director behind the Netflix series, they would be foolish not to be nervous. Garbus is known for her critically acclaimed exposes and for documenting the stories of "survivors", which is exactly how the Sussexes have defined themselves.

Her notable titles include The Farm: Angola; USA; Bobby Fischer Against the World; Love, Marilyn and the twice Academy Award-nominated What Happened, Miss Simone?, about the troubled life of jazz singer Nina Simone.

We do know that the docuseries, titled Harry & Meghan, will explore race, with tech entrepreneur Christopher Bouzy, of Bot Sentinel, explicitly saying in the trailer: "it's about hatred, it's about race." But who or what is Meghan's lawyer, Jenny Afia, alluding to when she tells the camera: "There was a war against Meghan to support other people's agendas"?

The subject of media intrusion is a given, though the two one-minute trailers released so far have been criticised for using footage unrelated to the couple to illustrate this theme: a Katie Price court appearance; a Harry Potter film premiere; a clip of Donald Trump's former lawyer, Michael Cohen, being pursued by media. Critics have also pointed out that images of a photographer on a balcony taking a picture of the couple with Archie down below appears to be of an accredited photographer standing in an agreed position during Harry and Meghan's Cape Town visit with Archbishop Desmond Tutu, rather than some intrusive, unauthorised paparazzo.

In past interviews, Harry and Meghan have accused the royal family of failing to help her when she experienced suicidal thoughts, and also suggested that Archie was denied the title of prince because of his race, though protocol requires him to be the grandson of a sovereign, which he has only just become with the accession of Charles.

Audiences will have to wait to see if there is more to come on both these extremely sensitive subjects, or on Meghan's estrangement from her father, Thomas Markle, and her half-siblings.

The first three episodes will stream on Netflix on 8 December, with Volume II, containing the final three episodes, streaming on 15 December.

Taliban carry out first public execution since taking over Afghanistan

Reuters

The Taliban put to death a man accused of murder in western Afghanistan, its spokesperson said on Wednesday, in the first officially confirmed public execution since the group took over the country last year.

The execution in western Farah province was of a man accused of fatally stabbing another man in 2017, Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said, and was attended by senior officials of the group.

▲ The acting interior minister, Sirajuddin Haqqani, was among more than a dozen senior Taliban officials who attended the execution. Photograph: Ali Khara/Reuters

The execution was carried out by the father of the victim, who shot the man three times, Mujahid added in a later statement.

The case was investigated by three courts and authorised by the group's supreme spiritual leader, who is based in southern Kandahar province, said Mujahid. More than a dozen senior Taliban officials attended the execution, he added, including the acting interior minister, Sirajuddin Haqqani, and the acting deputy prime minister, Abdul Ghani Baradar, as well as the country's chief justice, acting foreign minister and acting education minister.

The execution came after the country's supreme court announced public lashings of men and women accused of offences such as robbery and adultery had taken place in several provinces in recent weeks, a possible return to practices common during the Taliban's hardline rule in the 1990s.

A spokesperson for the UN human rights office last month called on the Taliban authorities to immediately halt public floggings in Afghanistan.

The Taliban's supreme spiritual leader, Haibatullah Akhundzada, met judges in November and said they should carry out punishments consistent with sharia law, according to a court statement.

Public lashings and executions by stoning took place under the previous 1996-2001 rule of the Taliban.

Such punishments later became rare and were condemned by the foreign-backed Afghan governments that followed, although the death penalty remained legal in Afghanistan.

Tokyo Olympics bribery scandal threatens to derail Winter Games bid

Justin McCurry in Toyko

More than a year after the Tokyo Olympics were held in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, their legacy has been overshadowed by a bribery scandal that threatens to derail a bid by another Japanese city to host the Winter Games.

This summer, as officials in Sapporo, on Japan's northernmost main island of Hokkaido, promoted their bid for the 2030 Games, police arrested Haruyuki Takahashi, a former Tokyo Olympics executive, on suspicion of taking bribes in return for helping companies become official sponsors for last year's event.

Seiko Hashimoto, who replaced Yoshiro Mori as head of the Tokyo 2020 organising committee after her predecessor made sexist remarks about female sports administrators, this month acknowledged the corruption allegations could negatively affect Sapporo's chances.

Describing the situation as "very severe", Hashimoto said she hoped investigators would get to the bottom of the 2020 allegations as soon as possible. "The significance and value of the Tokyo Games have come into question," she added, according to Kyodo news agency.

Takahashi, who is believed to have had a key role in selecting sponsors, was last month indicted for a fourth time, with the former senior managing director at Japan's biggest advertising agency, Dentsu, suspected of accepting 198m yen (£1.2m) in bribes from five firms. He has denied the allegations.

▲ *People pose for a picture with the Olympic signage at the Sapporo Olympic Museum. The city is bidding for the 2030 Winter Games after previously hosting them in 1972. Photograph: Yuichi Yamazaki/AFP/Getty Images*

In all, 15 people have been indicted over the scandal, including the former president of a Tokyo-based doll-maker that produced the Olympic and Paralympic mascots, as well as former and current executives from Aoki Holdings, a suit retailer that supplied the Japanese team's uniforms, and a publishing firm and advertising agency.

Mori, a former prime minister, volunteered to be interviewed by prosecutors in September amid reports that Aoki had given him money. Prosecutors said Mori had been questioned as an unsworn witness and not as a suspect.

In a separate development, police raided Dentsu's headquarters late last month in connection with allegations that bids had been rigged to decide which companies worked on test events for the Tokyo Games, which were postponed by a year due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Dentsu was instrumental in helping Tokyo win the 2020 Games when the International Olympic Committee (IOC) decided the host city in 2013. The company then secured record domestic sponsorship worth about 376bn yen (£2.25bn) – three times that raised for London 2012, the previous record-holder.

Involvement in the pre-Olympic test events would have put companies at a distinct advantage when it came to selecting firms to work on events during the 2020 Games.

"We continue to fully cooperate with this investigation," Dentsu said in a statement. Aoki Holdings previously said it would cooperate with authorities.

Sapporo last hosted the Winter Olympics in 1972 and had been hoping the Tokyo Games, which were mostly held behind closed doors but ended without triggering a major Covid outbreak, would strengthen its bid.

Sapporo is generally seen as having a stronger case than its only rival, Salt Lake City, but its campaign has been overshadowed by negative headlines about Tokyo 2020. Vancouver dropped its bid in October after it failed to receive support from the British Columbia government. The IOC is due to decide the host city next October.

In October, the mayor of Sapporo, Katsuhiro Akimoto, and the president of the Japanese Olympic Committee, Yasuhiro Yamashita, abruptly cancelled a visit to the IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland, to promote the city's bid. Yamashita claimed the decision had no connection with the bribery allegations, blaming "scheduling issues".

Michael Payne, who is credited with using sponsorship to transform the IOC's brand and finances as its director of marketing from 1989 to 2004, has said the bribery scandal is unlikely to affect Sapporo's "technically very strong bid".

"I think of this very much as a local, political issue," Payne told Agence France-Presse after Akimoto's cancelled visit. "It raised eyebrows as to why they're making such a meal out of what frankly is minor sponsor influence-peddling."

Although a survey conducted earlier this year found most Hokkaido residents supported the 2030 bid, Sapporo has rejected calls for a citywide referendum.

▲ *Haruyuki Takahashi, pictured in 2020, was indicted last month for a fourth time. Photograph: Issei Kato/Reuters*

The Asahi Shimbun said the scandal pointed to a "crucial lack of commitment to fairness and transparency".

"If the allegations turn out to be true, this is an extraordinary scandal involving almost all the parties among those awarding and receiving contracts. It is no wonder that the scandal is evoking deep public distrust," the newspaper said in an editorial this week. "A new bid to host the Olympics cannot win public support unless structural problems behind the scandal are rectified."

The IOC has attempted to distance itself from the scandal. Its president, Thomas Bach, did not attend an October ceremony at Tokyo's national stadium to mark the first anniversary of the Olympics and Paralympics, citing a scheduling conflict.

"We have full confidence in the Japanese authorities and also the auditors of the organising committee," the IOC said in a statement. "The IOC has every interest in the full clarification of this case."

Sister of Iran's supreme leader condemns protest crackdown

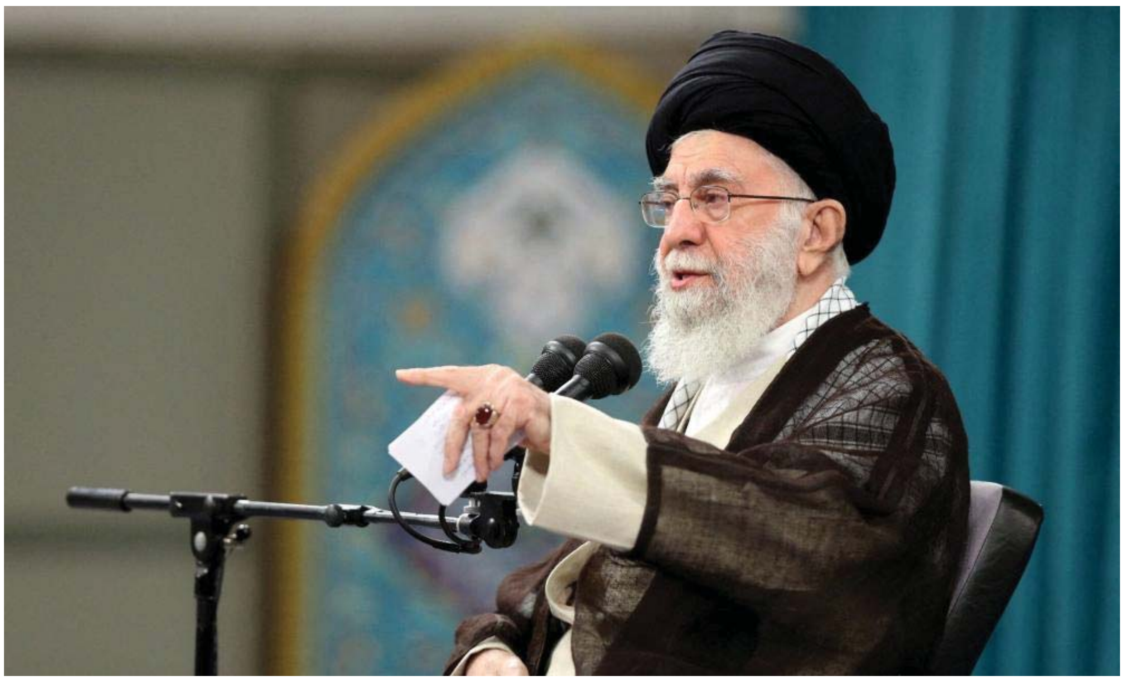
Oliver Holmes

A sister of Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei, has spoken out against his bloody crackdown on nationwide demonstrations, saying her brother's "despotic caliphate" has brought nothing but suffering, according to a letter published by her exiled son.

The letter came a day after the country's former president Mohammad Khatami also issued a rare statement to voice support for the protest movement, adding pressure on the regime from powerful political figures.

In her letter, Badri Hosseini Khamenei, who lives in Iran, called on the country's feared Revolutionary Guards and "mercenaries" to lay down their weapons as soon as possible and "join the people". She said she would herself join the rallies were it not for her poor health.

"I think it is appropriate now to declare that I oppose my brother's actions and I express my sympathy with all mothers mourning the crimes of the Islamic Republic," she wrote in the note that was shared on the Twitter account of her son, Mahmoud Moradkhani, and dated December 2022.


▲ *Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, was accused by his sister of not listening to his people, and instead taking counsel from 'his mercenaries and money-grubbers'. Photograph: Wana News Agency/Reuters*

Badri Hosseini Khamenei comes from a side of the family that has had a fraught relationship with the regime since it took power in a 1979 revolution that overthrew the western-friendly Shah. Her husband, Ali Tehrani, lived for years in exile in Iraq and regularly criticised the Islamic republic in radio broadcasts. On his return in 1995, Tehrani spent 10 years in jail. He died in October this year.

"The crimes of this system, the suppression of any dissenting voice, the imprisonment of the most educated and the most caring youth of this land, the most severe punishments, and the large-scale executions began from the very beginning," Khamenei said in her letter.

She suggested that she had decided to speak publicly after her daughter, Farideh Moradkhani, who also lives in Tehran, was detained last month. Moradkhani had long-criticised the regime, including in a video message released after her arrest that accused the government of not being "loyal to any of its religious principles".

"Losing a child and being away from your child is a great sadness for every mother," Khamenei wrote of her daughter. "Many mothers were bereaved during the last four decades. I think it is appropriate now to declare that I oppose my brother's actions and I express my sympathy with all mothers mourning the crimes of the Islamic Republic regime, from the time of [the former supreme leader Ruhollah] Khomeini to the current era of the despotic caliphate of Ali Khamenei.

"My concern has always been and will always be the people, especially the women of Iran. I believe that the regime of the Islamic Republic of Khomeini and Ali Khamenei has brought nothing but suffering and oppression to Iran and Iranians."

Continued *on page 17*

Continued *from page 16*

She accused her brother of not listening to his people, and instead taking counsel from "his mercenaries and money-grubbers".

Iran's clerics are facing their most ferocious challenge yet after the death in September of a 22-year-old woman, Mahsa Amini, sparked a nationwide uprising.

Amini was arrested for improperly wearing her headscarf and was apparently beaten into a coma by Iran's "morality police". In the days after her death, girls and women nationwide abandoned their legally imposed dress code and ripped off their hijabs.

Meanwhile, Tehran has presented the protest movement as a security crisis and has accused "terrorists" of killing dozens of security force members. On Tuesday, authorities sentenced five people to death for allegedly killing a member of a paramilitary force affiliated with the Revolutionary Guards, state media reported. Eleven others received prison sentences.

The 13 men and three minors – none of whom have been identified – were charged with killing Ruhollah Ajamian, a member of the Basij, a paramilitary volunteer branch of Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards, according to the report from Irna, a state news agency. According to Amnesty International, Iran executed at least 314 people in 2021.

Iran regularly sentences people on charges related to espionage and has painted the protest movement as a western-backed plot. The UN office of the high commissioner for human rights says more than 300 people have been killed so far in the crackdown, including more than 40 children.

Wednesday marked the final day of a three-day nationwide strike called for by the protesters. In posts circulating on social media, demonstrators asked businesses to shutter their doors.

The rallies have gained widespread backing across Iran, including from celebrities and famous athletes. On Tuesday, Khatami added his voice to the support, describing as "beautiful" the movement's main slogan – "Woman, life, freedom".

Khatami, a 79-year-old reformist who served as Iran's president from 1997 to 2005 but has since been sidelined, said the chant was "a beautiful message that shows movement towards a better future".

"Freedom and security must not be placed against each other," he said in a statement quoted by Isna news agency Tuesday, on the eve of Students' Day.

"Freedom must not be trampled on in order to maintain security" and "security should not be ignored in the name of freedom", he added.

Reuters and Agence France-Presse contributed to this report

Georgia's runoff was a resounding rebuke of Trumpism. Will Republicans hear it?

Lloyd Green

▲ *'Trump's big lie emerged as a turn-off. His recent call for the US constitution to be scrapped injured himself and Walker.' Photograph: Brynn Anderson/AP*

Tuesday delivered a spate of bad news for Donald Trump and the Republican party. First, Bennie Thompson, chairman of the January 6 committee, announced that criminal referrals to the US Department of Justice would be forthcoming. A few hours later, a Manhattan jury convicted the Trump Organization on 17 counts of tax fraud, conspiracy and falsification. According to prosecutors, the former president was complicit.

And now, the incumbent senator Raphael Warnock has prevailed in a hard-fought runoff. Georgia again rejected Herschel Walker and Donald Trump, his patron.

Come January, Mitch McConnell and his Republican colleagues in the US Senate will be staring at an actual 51-49 Democratic majority. The president's nominees will have an easier time winning confirmation. In the end, the minority leader and his caucus will bear a portion of the cost of those abortions Walker reportedly paid for.

The ex-University of Georgia football great now joins the ranks of other Trump-endorsed casualties: Pennsylvania's Dr Oz and Doug Mastriano; Arizona's Kari Lake and Blake Masters; Michigan's Tudor Dixon. Unfortunately for them, swing-state America yearned for normal.

Trump's big lie emerged as a turn-off. His recent call for the US constitution to be scrapped injured himself and Walker.

By the numbers, "three in 10 strong Trump supporters accept or are indifferent to white supremacist views," according to a Washington Post/ABC News poll taken in the aftermath of the hate-fest in Charlottesville.

The Republican party is its own twilight zone. But Georgia is no longer Trump country.

He lost the Peach state to Biden two years ago. On the eve of the January 2021 insurrection, both of his picks finished second in the state's Senate runoffs. Walker's flame-out is part of the continuum.

In contrast to Walker, Governor Brian Kemp, Georgia's Republican incumbent, threaded the political needle. On election day last month, he won despite defying Trump.

Most notably, the governor and his posse refused to nullify the 2020 election. Kemp even testified before a Fulton county, Georgia, grand jury, which may yet indict "45" and his hangers-on. Rudy Giuliani is officially a target in the inquiry. Jeopardy is in the air.

In hindsight, helping preserve democracy from Trump's onslaught proved itself to be smart politics. This past May, Kemp, Georgia's attorney general Chris Carr, and Brad Raffensperger, Trump's bete noire and Georgia's secretary of state, all survived primary challenges. Courage can come with an upside.

On that note, Jay Walker, a Kemp adviser, repeatedly told deep-pocketed donors that the governor was ready to gut his primary challenger, David Perdue, Trump's pick and a defeated former US senator. "We're going to go fucking scorched-earth," Walker supposedly said.

Most recently, Kemp took aim at Trump for his dinner with Ye, the antisemitic recording artist formerly known as Kanye West, and Nick Fuentes, his white supremacist, Holocaust-denying sidekick. "Racism, antisemitism, and denial of the Holocaust have no place in the Republican Party and are completely un-American," Kemp told the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.

Sadly, he stands out as an exception within the Republican party. Once upon a time, Trump and his legal minions brayed against tyranny. Not any more.

With Trump in office it was hello, praetorian. These days, it's crickets and spinelessness.

Take Jay Sekulow, Trump's personal lawyer. In an April 2016 brief to the US supreme court, Sekulow attacked Obama as a despot.

Echoing James Madison, founding father and fourth president, Sekulow thundered that the "accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive and judiciary, in the same hands … may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny".

Likewise, McConnell and 44 of his Republican colleagues accused Obama of seeking to "usurp" their powers when it came to recess appointments. To be sure, McConnell has remained silent in the face of ethnic slurs hurled at his wife by Trump.

Fittingly, the family of Capitol police officer Brian Sicknick, who died in the aftermath of the January 6 insurrection, refused to shake hands with McConnell and the Trump toady Kevin McCarthy at a Congressional Gold Medal ceremony. Ken Sicknick, the late officer's brother, told CBS News that the Republican leaders "have no idea what integrity is".

In 2016, Paul LePage, then governor of Maine, actually treated Trump's bubbling authoritarianism as a plus. "Our constitution is not only broken," he declared. "We need a Donald Trump to show some authoritarian power in our country."

LePage's dream is the Republicans' reality – and democracy's nightmare. "When someone tells you they want to abolish the constitution … and they're a wannabe dictator, believe them," Olivia Troye, Mike Pence's national security adviser, tweeted. "And when Republicans refuse to condemn it, believe what that means as well."

The question facing Kemp and the rest of the Republican leadership is whether they confront their Caesar. One thing is certain: if elected, Walker would have willingly rolled over. And he is far from alone.

"The real question is what does the base of the party think," Senator Mitt Romney recently acknowledged. "And they're still firmly behind him."

Lloyd Green is an attorney in New York and served in the US Department of Justice from 1990 to 1992

The Republican party is its own twilight zone. But Georgia is no longer Trump country

The only thing that should influence the news is the news

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I accidentally pepper-sprayed myself in the face. What's worse is admitting I feel unsafe in Philadelphia

Arwa Mahdawi

'Bad things happen in Philadelphia,' Donald Trump once warned. Last weekend, a very bad thing happened in Philadelphia: I pepper-sprayed myself in the face. I had bought some pepper spray keyrings online because, after a spate of armed robberies in my neighbourhood, I was worried about walking my dog at night.

My dog is the size of a large rat so he doesn't really deter bad guys – unless the bad guys are scared of rats. Anyway, I had gone out to the garden to test the spray – I'm not a complete idiot, I didn't want to inhale that stuff in a confined space – and managed to get some droplets on my face. At first it was kind of pleasant. A nice little tingle. An exhilarating Philly facial. Then it started getting painful. Then I rubbed my eyes and …. yikes! 0/10 do not recommend.

You think admitting I pepper-sprayed myself is embarrassing? As a proud progressive, admitting that I feel unsafe in Philadelphia feels way more embarrassing. Rightwingers in the US are obsessed with the narrative that Democrat-led cities such as Philadelphia are dystopian hellscapes where you will almost certainly be killed if you step out of your house.

▲ *'At first it was an exhilarating Philly facial … then it started getting painful' (posed by model). Photograph: francescocarniani/Getty Images/iStockphoto*

While the right cynically politicises crime (Fox News slashed its crime coverage in half after the midterm elections), they're not entirely wrong about the problem. Shootings have surged in Philadelphia since the pandemic. By early August, more than 1,400 people had been shot in the city this year. Gun violence is out of control.

The right blames this violence on liberals and the movement to defund the police: Philadelphia has a famously progressive district attorney who, they argue, is too easy on criminals. The real reason for all this violence, however, is that Philadelphia has high rates of poverty and easy access to guns. That's not a winning combination.

The antidote for all this violence isn't rocket science. You increase social safety nets; you decrease poverty; you decrease access to guns. Unfortunately, there seems to be zero will in the US to do any of this. Which is great news for the pepper-spray industry and bad news for everyone else.

● Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our letters section, please click here.

My trip to space made me realise we have only one Earth – it must live long and prosper

William Shatner

Last year, at the age of 90, I had a life-changing experience. I went to space, after decades of playing a science-fiction character who was exploring the universe and building connections with many diverse life forms and cultures. I thought I would experience a similar feeling: a feeling of deep connection with the immensity around us, a deep call for endless exploration. A call to indeed boldly go where no one had gone before.

I was absolutely wrong. As I explained in my latest book, what I felt was totally different. I knew that many before me had experienced a greater sense of care while contemplating our planet from above, because they were struck by the apparent fragility of this suspended blue marble. I felt that too. But the strongest feeling, dominating everything else by far, was the deepest grief that I had ever experienced.

While I was looking away from Earth, and turned towards the rest of the universe, I didn't feel connection; I didn't feel attraction. What I understood, in the clearest possible way, was that we were living on a tiny oasis of life, surrounded by an immensity of death. I didn't see infinite possibilities of worlds to explore, of adventures to have, or living creatures to connect with. I saw the deepest darkness I could have ever imagined, contrasting starkly with the welcoming warmth of our nurturing home planet.

▲ *Star Trek actor William Shatner, 90, speaks to the media after his space flight in October 2021. Photograph: Mike Blake/Reuters*

This was an immensely powerful awakening for me. It filled me with sadness. I realised that we had spent decades, if not centuries, being obsessed with looking away, with looking outside. I played my part in popularising the idea that space was the final frontier. But I had to get to space to understand that Earth is, and will remain, our only home. And that we have been ravaging it, relentlessly, making it uninhabitable.

I was born in Montreal in 1931. During my lifetime, this world has changed faster than for any generation before us. We are now at an ecological tipping point. Without the bold leadership that the times require, we are facing further climate breakdown and ecosystems collapsing before our eyes, with as many as one million species at risk of extinction, according to the latest scientific assessments.

And of all places, it is in the city where I was born that a crucial meeting of the United Nations is being held. At Cop15, the UN biodiversity summit in Montreal, taking place from 7 to 19 December, world governments will negotiate a global deal to stop the loss of biodiversity by the end of the decade. We need world leaders to give their diplomats a powerful mandate for these talks: agree on strong targets to change the way we produce food, to drastically cut pollution, and to conserve 50% of our planet's land and ocean, with the active leadership of Indigenous peoples and local communities, who have historically been pioneers on all these necessary actions.

I was the oldest man to go to space. I worry about the world my grandchildren will be living in when they are my age. My generation is leaving them a planet that might pretty soon be barely livable for many of Earth's inhabitants. My experience in space filled me with sadness, but also with a strong resolve. I don't want my grandchildren to simply survive. I want them, as an old friend used to say, to be able to live long and prosper.

I will do everything I can so that we can protect our one and only home. Our world leaders have an immense responsibility to do the same in Montreal.

William Shatner is a Canadian actor who played Captain James T Kirk in Star Trek for almost 30 years. He is also author of Boldly Go: Reflections on a Life of Awe and Wonder

I worry about the world my grandchildren will be living in when they are my age

Kirstie Alley was celebrated not because she was flawless – but because her flaws were so visible

Veronica Esposito

It was an impressively shocking moment in the hit sitcom Cheers when actor Kirstie Alley opened her mouth to reveal her tongue gripping a lit cigarette – in one short, catlike movement, she expertly flipped it over, caught it between her teeth and sunk in to a satisfied puff of smoke. In the scene, Alley is wearing a pink turtleneck beneath a pink coat sporting big, 80s shoulders, the whole moment conjuring the feeling of the alpha bad girl taking a surreptitious smoke break in the ladies' room.

That moment sums up a lot about the unique personality that Alley brought to Cheersand the decades of acting and celebrity that would follow as she hewed out a persona that was compelling in its complexity.

Although by the time Alley arrived at Cheers in 1987 she had already developed a reputation with roles in the films Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan and Runaway, it was in the hit Boston sitcom that Alley reached stardom, winning an Emmy for her portrayal of neurotic businesswoman Rebecca Howe. She boldly stepped into the absence made by the departure of lead actress Shelley Long, establishing herself as a force in her own right and giving the show a new lease on life.

Alley's Howe emanated a roughness and wildness beneath the surface of a highly polished, if undeniably maladjusted femininity – in that, it very much resembled Alley's infamous Emmys speech, where she offered a disjointed, bawdy series of remarks that felt as sincere and joyful as they did boundary-pushing and inappropriate.

▲ Kirstie Alley and her husband Parker Stevenson at the Golden Globe awards in 1991 in Los Angeles. Photograph: Barry King/Alamy

As her career grew, Alley moved beyond Cheers to star in popular movies like the Look Who's Talking trilogy, as well as becoming the lead character in the the sitcom Veronica's Closet, where she played the owner of a company selling racy lingerie and other things to be enjoyed in the bedroom. Projects such as these continued building her trajectory as an actor willing to push her sex appeal into edgy territory, while also letting her shine as an anxiety-ridden everywoman who just wants to find a good man and fall in love.

Much as with the fictional characters she depicted, in her personal life Alley very publicly went her own way. She credited her affiliation with the Church of Scientology for helping her overcome a serious cocaine addiction, and in the church she ultimately reached the status of Operating Thetan Level 8, an extremely high rank costing millions of dollars to obtain. She also courted controversy in her affiliation with candidate Donald Trump, pledging then retracting her support for him in the 2016 presidential election, ultimately declaring in October 2020 that she had voted for him once and planned to do so again. Amid all the scrutiny of her Trump ties, it was less remembered that Alley also voted for Barack Obama twice.

Alley had a similarly on-again, off-again relationship with the weight loss company Jenny Craig, first operating as a spokesperson, then departing from the company and starting her own weight-loss enterprise, Organic Liaison, then eventually selling that company to Jenny Craig and resuming spokesperson duties. Just as her relationship with Jenny Craig went back and forth, so did her weight: on Oprah in 2005, she very publicly castigated herself for weighing too much, then returned to that show a year later modelling a bikini, her weight continuing to very publicly yo-yo for a decade afterwards.

Along the way Alley turned her calorie angst into a mordant, unscripted, semi-autobiographical Showtime series called Fat Actress, a very prototypical move for her. Alley's shoot-from-the-hip stance and high-profile battles with her demons were things that resonated with fans, as was her reputation for having a big heart and not putting on airs. While Alley's support for Trump or her many incendiary, expletive-laden tweets were often divisive (Alley claimed that her Trump votes got her blackballed by Hollywood), it's telling that Jenny Craig never pulled her back as a spokesperson and that her death occasioned an outpouring of fond remembrances, even from those she had feuded with.

Alley was so widely celebrated not because she was flawless but because her flaws were so visible – she was among those celebrities who are compelling because they eschew the

▲ Kirstie Alley in the 2005 Showtime series Fat Actress. Photograph: Showtime/Kobal/Rex/Shutterstock

carefully managed image of the famous in favour of offering something that feels completely unfiltered and thus far more intimate.

It was this sense of unscripted intimacy that she brought to her best roles and that defined her as an actor, letting her inhabit her characters with a forcefulness bordering on swagger. Alley achieved prominence at a time when actors like Roseanne Barr and Rosie O'Donnell courted controversy in large part by defying sexist expectations of how a female celebrity should come off in public life, and how she should portray characters in film and TV.

If some of Alley's stances now feel retrograde or even cringe-inducing, they are reflective of the degree to which the forces that forged her as an actor swallowed her up. Right till the end, Alley presented a picture of an individual actively working to heal herself amid a painful, difficult search for peace.

John Lennon and Yoko Ono simulate making love – Allan Tannenbaum's best photograph

Interview by Lydia Figes

I first met John Lennon in 1975, backstage at a televised event in New York when I was staff photographer for the SoHo Weekly News. Years later, while I was still at the paper, we decided to run an interview with Yoko Ono ahead of the release of the couple's new album, Double Fantasy. They had spent the previous five years as recluses, during which time they had their son, Sean. I didn't know Yoko personally but I'd always had a lot of respect for her as an artist, and of course I was a big fan of John's. The idea was that we'd get access to the pair of them by approaching Yoko first.

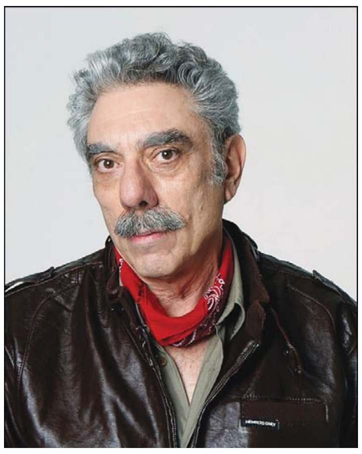
On 20 November 1980, Yoko came to my Tribeca studio for the shoot. She was shy in front of the camera but eventually grew more comfortable, taking off her shades and leather jacket, finally striking a cute pose with her hand on her jeans zipper. We agreed to take more shots the next day at the apartment building where she and John lived, the Dakota. I had breakfast nearby and walked around, trying to find the right moment to ask Yoko whether we could take photos with John and Sean as well. "Not Sean," she said. "But I'll call John." He was friendly and said he remembered me from the event in 1975, although maybe he was only being polite. The three of us walked around their favourite area of Central Park, later named Strawberry Fields in John's memory.

▲ 'Their love for each other was palpable' … Lennon and Ono, during the making of the video for Starting Over. Photograph: Allan Tannenbaum

Five days later, I got a call asking me to join them at the shoot of the Starting Over music video. After filming them walking around the park, we went to another of their favourite spots, Cafe La Fortuna on West 71st Street, to drink coffee and talk. Then we set off for SoHo's Sperone Westwater gallery in their limo. It was clear I had earned their trust and they felt comfortable with me. The gallery had been set up to look like their real bedroom, with lights outside shining through venetian blinds. For the first part of the filming they wore their normal clothes, but then took them off and simulated making love. Many of the crew were asked to leave but I remained, taking photographs discreetly. Their interaction was fluid and natural, their love for each other palpable.

This shot, with John lying on top of Yoko, was taken after a moment of tension. John kept trying to kiss Yoko, but she'd move her chin higher and higher. "What is this … Ben fucking Hur?" he joked and it broke the ice. Everybody on set cracked up, especially Yoko. That's when I got this shot of them laughing. Back at the Dakota a few days later, looking through the contact sheets, John said: "These are great! You know what I like about your photographs? They really capture Yoko's beauty."

On 8 December, the day of John's assassination, my editor called. He told me John had been shot. I was in shock. That night, after photographing at the hospital and police station, I stood outside the Dakota until the early morning, with hundreds of others who joined the vigil. A few days later, Yoko asked me to come to the apartment. When I arrived, she was in bed. Her grief filled the room. She told me she wanted to keep busy. It was her only way to cope.



▲ Allan Tannenbaum. Photograph: Joachim Johnson

We worked together on a project for the single Walking on Thin Ice. It was the last song she and John had writ-

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ten together: John had been holding the final mix when he was killed. I photographed a frozen reservoir in upstate New York, though it wasn't used as the record jacket as intended, but instead as a still photo in the video clip. I remained in contact with Yoko for many years, attending her birthday parties and working on projects together. She kindly wrote the foreword of my book, John & Yoko: A New York Love Story. The last time I saw her was maybe four years ago.

I became a photographer because I've always liked technology and art; photography merges the two disciplines. My training had been in fine art and film-making, so I essentially taught myself photography in the 60s with a 35mm camera. My curiosity for people and interest in journalism also drove me. The job at SoHo Weekly News, which I got in 1973 at the age of 28, was my big break. It gave me access to New York's music scene: the concerts and backstage life, as well as the nightlife at Studio 54. I've met and photographed nearly everyone from that scene: the Clash, Nico, Andy Warhol, Patti Smith, Debbie Harry, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and David Bowie. The thrill of being part of that is what keeps me going today.

Allan Tannenbaum's CV

Born: New Jersey, 1945.Trained: BA in art from Rutgers University in 1967; graduate film department at San Francisco State University, 1967-1968.Influences:Henri Cartier-Bresson, Brassaï, Robert Capa, Weegee, Garry Winogrand, Robert Frank, David Bailey, Paul Fusco, Ralph Gibson.High point: "Photographing John Lennon and Yoko Ono, November 1980."Low point: "Photographing the aftermath of Lennon's assassination, December 1980."Top tip: "When asking photographer Ralph Gibson in my early days at the SoHo News about what direction I should take, he said: 'The work will show you the way.' And that's what happened. Another tip from Jaakov Kohn, first editor of the SoHo News: 'Perseverance furthers.'"

● John & Yoko: A New York Love Story by Allan Tannenbaum is published by Insight Editions

'These are great,' John said. 'You know what I like about your photographs? They really capture Yoko's beauty'

Noisy neighbours can make you ill – but it's not the shouting and loud music you should worry about

Name: Noisy neighbours.

Age: From stumbling toddler to cane-wielding pensioner.

Appearance: It's not what they look like; it's what they sound like.

What do they sound like? Thudding footsteps overhead, the random dropping of objects, the insistent scraping of furniture being moved for no reason.

I'm sure they have a reason. Well, I'd like to know what it is.

What about shouting? Does shouting count? Not for our purposes – we're talking about "impact sounds", a major source of complaint in multi-unit dwellings, and a potential health hazard.

Health hazard? Says who? Markus Müller-Trapet of the National Research Council of Canada. He claims exposure to this sort of neighbour noise can lead to sleep disturbance and even cardiovascular problems.

And how would he know? Because he just presented a paper at the 183rd Meeting of the Acoustical Society of America, entitled Noise From Above: A Summary of Studies Regarding the Perceived Annoyance Due to Impact Sounds.

▲ *'Impact sounds' can lead to sleep disturbance and even cardiovascular problems. Photograph: AntonioGuillem/Getty Images/iStockphoto*

What exactly is impact sound? Distinct sounds characterised by abrupt onset and rapid decay – clanking, banging, thudding, pounding. Acoustics experts suggest they are more annoying than continuous sounds, such as conversation or music.

They should try living next to my neighbours, who are always watching Neighbours.Neighbours is on a break till next year …

Yes, but they still whistle the theme tune. Anyway, the environmental impact of impact noise is poorly understood, which is why Müller-Trapet and a team of researchers have set out to measure just how annoying it is.

How do they do that? By recording a range of impact sounds and presenting them to test subjects for evaluation.

Where is this happening? Because I think they might be carrying out these experiments in the flat above mine. There's also an online survey you can participate in, where you listen to impact sounds and rate how annoying they are.

That's more or less what I do, anyway, when I work from home. The rise in home working has made noisy neighbours a real issue, with people reporting that they have become more sensitive to noise since the pandemic.

What can be done? In the long term, it is hoped research will enable planners to create a more livable built environment.

Can't I just go upstairs and tell them to shut up? Maybe try earplugs first.

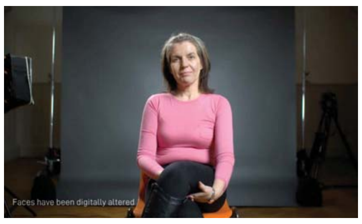
Do say: "With a little understanding, you can find the perfect blend …"

Don't say: "Sorry, mate. These bowling balls I've been polishing are incredibly slippery."

I'm An Alcoholic: Inside Recovery review – the first ever peek inside an AA meeting is hugely moving

Rebecca Nicholson

This has been quite a week for honest TV. As Channel 4 pushed boundaries by documenting the dissection of My Dead Body, so BBC Two is exploring another previously hidden arena, with I'm an Alcoholic: Inside Recovery, which promises "unprecedented access" to an AA meeting. This is a sensitive and impeccably balanced documentary, but at the heart of it is suffering, and how some of those who live with their demons have managed to find ways to do so.



▲ *'The faces of those participating are digitally altered, thus maintaining anonymity' … I'm an Alcoholic: Inside Recovery (BBC Two). Photograph: BBC/Daisybeck Photograph: BBC/Daisybeck Productions*

The issue with making a documentary about Alcoholics Anonymous is obvious from the name of the organisation, but this has found a workaround. Using recent technological developments, the faces of those participating are digitally altered, thus maintaining the principle of anonymity. As one woman, known here as Niam, puts it: "It doesn't matter that it's not my face." The story is what counts.

Alcoholics Anonymous has reached its 75th anniversary, and Inside Recovery carefully outlines its origins and ideals. It begins with its very first meetings in the US in the 1930s, and there is archive footage. In the UK, the first meeting was held at the Dorchester hotel, and advertised only in the Financial Times, as no other paper would allow it. At one point, when exploring step nine – making amends for past behaviour – it shows a black-and-white clip of a suited man approaching a police officer and saying: "I'm sorry I tried to sock you, I acted like a heel." Language has certainly changed, if the guiding principles have not.

At regular intervals, we are reminded of two points – the fact that AA is rooted in Christianity, and the fact that it does not work for everyone. But for some it does, and here, we meet a wide range of people who are in recovery from alcohol, as they put it in AA. The three main interviewees are Andy, who has been in recovery for 17 years and still goes to three meetings a week; Niam, who has been in recovery for 15 years; and Rhys, who has been in recovery for 17 months. Their tales are a form of "the share", or volunteering to speak at meetings, when addicts may choose to discuss their experiences, past and present.

A surprising number of parts of an AA meeting, and steps in the programme, are familiar to anyone who has come across it in popular culture, if not real life. The film understands that people will have some grasp of the basics, but doesn't assume much more than that, which gives it a patient

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tone. The meeting itself, interwoven with qualifying and explanatory information from medical experts and historians, is in a church hall with plastic chairs. It is neutral and oddly ordinary, and it is fascinating and moving to witness people simply telling their stories to each other as well as to us. Often they are stories of despair. One man says he simply could not imagine continuing to live as he did when he was drinking. Another talks about deciding not to visit a newborn relative, because she preferred to spend time alone with a bottle of gin. But this is also a place of hope, and with the willingness to share the lows comes the possibility of peer support and community.

Inside Recovery is cautious, though, and offers alternative perspectives, too. It does not sugarcoat recovery, nor push the idea that AA is a panacea for alcoholism. Some people start coming to AA meetings for a while and then drop out, never to be heard from again. Others start AA more than once, until it clicks for them; for some, it never clicks at all. Experts weigh up the positives and the negatives, exploring the "higher power" element that can be problematic for many, and using refreshingly nuanced concepts such as offering addicts empowerment instead of powerlessness.

In the UK, an estimated 600,000 people have alcohol dependence, and from weddings to football matches to finishing a long day at work, alcohol is ingrained in the culture, and very difficult to avoid. It is impossible not to admire the candour and courage of those who have taken part in this film, who represent a great many more people. One woman recalls discovering alcohol through seeing people drink on television, but says that television is where she also discovered the existence of AA meetings. Perhaps this uplifting film could have that effect for lots of others, too.

How to make nut roast – recipe

Felicity Cloake

The butt of a thousand tired jokes at the expense of the 'knit-your-own-lentil brigade', nut roast may not be quite as fashionable a plant-based centrepiece as a whole cauliflower or a swede steak, but, packed full of luxurious nuts, savoury mushrooms and soft, sweet root veg, it's a cliche well worth reviving.

▲ *A cliche well worth reviving: Felicity Cloake's nut roast. Photograph: Laura Edwards/The Guardian. Food and prop styling: Kitty Coles. Food assistant: El Kemp.*

Prep 25 minCook 1 hr 15 minServes 6 (with accompaniments)

2 large parsnipsSalt and black pepperOil, to grease1 savoy cabbage, 6-8 outer leaves only1 red onion150g chestnut mushrooms100g peeled and cooked chestnuts150g hazelnuts40g butter, or 2½ tbsp oil40g cranberries100g brown breadcrumbs1 small bunch fresh sage, leaves picked100g stilton (or other vegetarian or vegan-friendly cheese of your choice), optional ½ tsp mixed spice1 egg, or 2 tbsp Marmite(or similar)

1 Cook and puree the parsnips

Peel the parsnips, cut them into roughly equal chunks, then cook in a large pan of boiling, salted water until tender. Scoop out with a slotted spoon, and put a lid on the pan to keep the water hot for the next step. Drain the parsnips very well, then mash or puree until smooth.

2 Blanch the cabbage

Lightly grease a 21cm x 11cm x 7cm loaf tin with oil, then line it with foil and grease the foil generously, too. Pull off six of the nicest-looking outer leaves from the cabbage, then wash them and trim the bases. Blanch these in the pot of boiling water for two minutes and fill a large bowl or the sink with iced water.

3 Refresh the cabbage

Scoop the cabbage leaves into the iced water, then check you have enough to line the tin, leaving no gaps; if not, blanch and refresh a couple more leaves. Keep the cabbage leaves in the iced water while you make the filling – this will keep them as green as possible, which will make for a more attractive-looking end result.

4 Start on the filling

Peel and finely chop the onion, and finely chop the mushrooms and chestnuts, keeping them all separate for the time being. Heat a dry frying pan on a medium-high heat, then toast the hazelnuts, shaking the pan regularly, until they start to colour; take care not to burn them. Tip the nuts out of the pan and leave to cool.

5 Saute the onion and mushrooms

Turn down the heat to medium, add the butter or oil to the pan, and sweat the onion, stirring from time to time, until soft but not coloured. Add the mushrooms, cook, stirring regularly, until both are soft and the pan is dry, then tip out into a large bowl. Turn off the heat under the pan but don't wash it up just yet.

6 Finish the filling

Roughly chop the hazelnuts and add these to the mushroom bowl, along with the chopped chestnuts, cranberries and breadcrumbs. Finely chop the sage leaves until you have about about two tablespoons and add that to the bowl as well. If you are using the cheese, crumble that in now, followed by the mashed parsnips and the mixed spice, then stir briefly until everything is evenly distributed.

7 Add the binding agent

Beat the egg, then add that to the filling mix (alternatively, mix the Marmite with 50ml hot water and stir that in instead). Season with salt (if you used Marmite, hold back a little), then check the seasoning by frying a scant teaspoonful of the filling mixture and adjusting as necessary. If you're cooking the nut roast immediately, heat the oven to 200C (180C fan)/390F/gas 6.

8 Build the nut roast

Dry the blanched, refreshed cabbage leaves well, then use them to line the prepared tin, overlapping them to ensure there are no gaps and leaving any excess hanging over the sides. Spoon in the filling mixture, press it down well, then fold any overhanging cabbage leaves over the top. Cover tightly with foil and bake for 45 minutes. (Alternatively, keep in the fridge for up to 48 hours before cooking.)

9 Finishing touches

Remove the foil from the top, then roast the uncovered loaf for another 15 minutes. Once ready, place a large serving plate over the top of the tin and, holding the tin with oven gloves, turn over so the loaf inverts on to the plate. Carefully peel off the foil, slice and serve.

Fiona Beckett's drinks match

Under £10Opinor Touriga Nacional 2021 £7.99 Lidl Wine Tour, 14.5%. Big, hearty, spicy red, and a total bargain.

Over £10Château Tour du Pas Saint-Georges 2017 £15 selected Co-ops, 14%. Nuts can be as good a foil as beef for a mature bordeaux, and this Saint-Émilion is classy stuff.

Switzerland's brilliant new train route: direct from Montreux to Interlaken

Caroline Bishop

As the train winds up the hillside above Lac Léman's north shore, leaving Montreux behind, I know exactly where we're heading because I've done this journey before. The bustle of the so-called Swiss Riviera will give way to the tranquil farming country of the Pays d'Enhaut, followed by the upmarket resort of Gstaad, before a gentle descent to Interlaken, between the twin lakes of Thun and Brienz in the Bernese Oberland. This 70-mile route, which crosses the röstigraben (the French-Swiss German language border) and links some of Switzerland's most famous tourist centres, has existed for more than 100 years. But there's one big difference today: thanks to a world first in rail technology, I don't have to change trains halfway through.

▲ *The GoldenPass uses a new system to enable it to run on different rail gauges*

The GoldenPass line, as it's called, opened in stages between 1901 and 1916, the realisation of a decades-old dream to connect Lake Geneva, Gstaad and the Bernese Oberland by rail. But the journey wasn't seamless. Because of the mountainous terrain, the railway from Montreux to Zweisimmen required metric gauge rails (one-metre wide), while the stretch from Zweisimmen to Interlaken was built with standard gauge (1.435 metres wide). Given no train could travel on both, passengers had to change at Zweisimmen.

Not much of an inconvenience, you might think. Nevertheless, the Swiss relish an engineering challenge, and this was one the Montreux Oberland Bernois railway (MOB) and BLS (the two train companies operating the line) were determined to solve. After decades wrestling with this technological conundrum, in 2008 MOB proposed a solution: a bespoke bogie (the part of a train's undercarriage that supports the wheels) which can narrow or widen to fit the different widths of the two railways, as well as adjust to their different

▲ *A view from the train window. Photograph: Caroline Bishop*

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platform heights.

Developed in Switzerland by Alstom, the resultant technology is unique. Though variable-gauge bogies exist elsewhere, no other can adapt quite as much as this one, making it a world first for Switzerland – a country that just loves a railway-related record. The alpine nation already has the world's longest and deepest train tunnel (the Gotthard Base Tunnel), the world's steepest funicular (the Stoosbahn in Schwyz) and Europe's highest railway station (the Jungfraujoch at 3,454 metres). The world's most variable bogie may not have quite the same ring, but it's still a remarkable achievement in train technology.

From 11 December the brand new GoldenPass Express trains, fitted with these bogies, offer passengers a non-stop 3hr 15min journey with no need to cart luggage from platform to platform halfway through. However, that's not the only reason MOB invested £77m in the project. It also wanted to bring glamour to the line. The new carriages have large two-part windows and table seating in all three classes – second, first and "prestige". The latter is a step up, literally: the carriage sits 40cm higher than the rest, supposedly immersing passengers more fully in the landscape (though I find the scenery just as glorious from second class), while its heated, reclinable seats can swivel to face the direction of travel. The onboard menu of local products also has added wow factor in first and prestige, including Swiss-made caviar from the Tropenhaus in Frutigen, a fish farm that harnesses thermal water from the mountains.

Lovely though all this is, nothing beats the view. This ultra-modern ride takes us past rural rail stations, traditional wooden chalets and farm buildings, forests daubed with fresh snow, and the 15th-century church of Château d'Oex, whose position on the La Motte rock makes it a photogenic focal point during the hot air balloon festival that takes place here every January. Though the idea of the GoldenPass Express is that you don't get off, there's plenty of temptation en route.

The technological magic happens about two hours in, when we reach Zweisimmen station. As the carriages pass over a special ramp installed on the track, flaps support their weight so the bogies can adjust with the pressure off. It happens in seconds, and so smoothly that it's unnoticeable, which is entirely the point. Most of the eight-minute stoppage time is taken up by switching the locomotive that drives the train, since the two railways also run on a different electrical voltage.

Then we're off again, onwards and gently downwards until we emerge from the hills and skirt Lake Thun on the way to Interlaken, where our journey ends. We've swapped French for Swiss German, the palm trees and vineyards of Montreux for views of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau (Grindelwald, with its new Eiger Express cable car and onwards connection to the Jungfraujoch, is just half an hour away) and it's finally time to disembark. However, the GoldenPass line doesn't actually finish here. From Interlaken, passengers can continue to Lucerne, though with a change of train since part of that stretch of the railway is cogwheel. Might the new trains be adapted accordingly? It's another technical challenge for the Swiss to solve – and I have no doubt that one day, they will.

This trip was provided by Switzerland Tourism and the Swiss Travel System. A one-way journey from Montreux to Interlaken costs fromCHF53 (£46)in second class. Seat reservations, at extra cost (£17), are advised

We've swapped French for Swiss German, the palm trees and vineyards of Montreux for views of the Eiger and Jungfrau

Discovered in the deep: the extraordinary sawshark with a weapon-like snout

Helen Scales

Swimming through the ocean are sharks that look as if they have a hedge trimmer fixed to their heads and a dangling moustache part way along it. These are sawsharks and they use their formidable headgear to slash through shoals of fish. The moustache is a sensory device that helps the sharks detect prey.

"Sawsharks are something extraordinary," says Simon Weigmann from the Elasmobranch Research Laboratory in Hamburg, Germany.

Until recently, scientists knew of eight species of sawshark, including one that has six gill slits in the side of its body."This is unusual among sharks," says Weigmann – as most sharks have five gill slits. With the help of fishers in Madagascar and Tanzania, two more species of sixgill sawsharks have come to light.

Long before western scientists named them, people in fishing communities in south-west Madagascar already knew about metre-long,

▲ *'Something extraordinary': dorsal, ventral and lateral views of a sawshark. Photograph: Simon Weigmann/Natural History Museum*

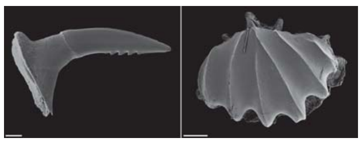
sixgill sawsharks and called them *vae vae*. In 2017, a Malagasy fisher gave two of the saw-like snouts (called rostra) to Ruth Leeney, a biologist visiting from London's Natural History Museum. Realising they were something different, she sent them to Weigmann. He tracked down more preserved specimens that had been sitting on shelves in museums, and realised they belonged to a distinct species of sixgill sawshark.

"Formerly, we thought that we just had one species occurring off South Africa, Mozambique and Madagascar. Now we know Madagascar has a different species," says Weigmann.

The name he picked for the scientific literature is *Pliotrema kajae* – Kaja's sixgill sawshark – after his young daughter who watched on with great interest while he examined the preserved shark specimens at home. Kaja also means warrior in Frisian, a west-Germanic language, which Weigmann thought was appropriate given sharks' weapon-like snouts.A specimen of a third species of sixgill sawshark came to Weigmann after colleagues visited a fish market on the Tanzanian island of Zanzibar. He named this one *Pannae*, after Kaya's cousin Anna.Something that sets these species apart from previously known sawsharks is that their moustaches (technically known as barbels) lie closer to the tip of their snouts, but Weigmann doesn't yet know the relevance of this.

Similarly, there's no obvious explanation for why these sawsharks have six gill slits. Out of the more than 1,000 species of sharks and rays, only a handful have six or seven gill slits.

The three species of sixgill sawsharks live in different parts of the Indian Ocean. The original species, *Pwarreni*, lives off South Africa and southern Mozambique, down to about 900 metres. Kajas have been found between 200 and 300 metres underwater off Madagascar and on the submarine Mascarene plateau that stretches between Seychelles and Mauritius. Annas have so far only been found off Zanzibar, in much shallower waters of between 20 and 35 metres."It's important to give the species a name, to bring attention to it," says Weigmann. The next steps will be to work out just how threatened the species is and whether it needs protecting.



▲ *Details of the unique tooth structure of a Kaja's sixgill sawshark. Photograph: Simon Weigmann*

It's important just to give the species a name, to bring attention to it

Simon Weigmann

Slashers, demons and head exploders: why horror revels in modern architecture

Owen Hatherley

The Ikon Gallery in Birmingham is an old Victorian school that was turned inside out and filled with new modernist interiors in the late 1990s. It looks to the untrained eye like a place of dusty classrooms and tiled corridors, but inside you'll find glass stairwells and white cube gallery spaces. Around you, nearly everything is modern. Ikon stands in one of the first New Labour urban regeneration showpieces – Brindleyplace, all chain cafes, pristine lawns and squares, and canalside office blocks. It is privately secured and patrolled, managed apart from the rest of the city. Nothing is allowed to go wrong; nothing is quite what it seems; nothing is real. It's an appropriately uneasy place for Horror in the Modernist Block, a show aiming to explore the perhaps obscure links between modern architecture and horror.

Horror is generally about the irrational. It is a matter of things that do not exist – ghosts, vampires, zombies – and about how the brain manufactures terrors for itself in situations where you're usually entirely safe. It's also, often, about the past: the revenants and spectres left over from an earlier, apparently less enlightened age. Accordingly, a "haunted house" is usually not cubic and made of steel and concrete. But terror has certainly happened in modern buildings. In fact, the terms used to be all-but-synonymous for tabloid headline writers who, from the 70s to 90s, filled their pages with stories about ghastly scenes of murder and social dysfunction in high-rise social housing estates, and branded London's Trellick Tower the Tower of Terror (flats there now sell for more than £1m).

But merely being frightened by things is not quite the same as horror, and there was usually nothing particularly supernatural about tabloid crime stories set in "sink estates" – as if the architecture does not lend itself to the mindset of real horror. This is not coincidental. The reason why a "haunted house" tends to be old and gothic isn't just the fact that its floorboards might have a satisfyingly eerie creek, but because there is so much unseen in a Victorian house. Originally, every surface will have been covered in doilies, rugs, throws and carpets, and everything from table legs to dinner services will have been richly ornamented; moreover, there were places you weren't meant to see, from the servants' quarters below to half-forgotten attics within steep pitched roofs.

In the 1920s, all that was suddenly swept away, for a kind of house that would be a rational "machine for living in", with no past, and a present without dust, dirt or dark corners. The sentimentality, superstitious religiosity and brutal inequality of the 19th-century city would be swept away in favour of logical, egalitarian, clear-eyed cities. Walter Benjamin praised this new modernist architecture – the right-angled, glassy, clean modernist houses of Le Corbusier or Mies van der Rohe – for constructing places where you could

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not leave *traces*. That is, these were houses without ghosts.

Horror in the Modernist Block showcases artists examining the ways in which these buildings can be eerie and alienating. For instance, in Kihlberg and Henry's film Slow Violence or artist NT's film BRUTAL, Birmingham's high-rise estates and new luxury living enclaves are looming and sinister; Firenze Lai's paintings stress the confining, claustrophobic nature of Hong Kong's high-rise housing; Ho Tzu Nyen's video The Cloud of Unknowing stages the ghostly invasion of a Singapore public housing estate and the demonic possession of its residents on the eve of its demolition; and in Maria Taniguchi's Mies 421, the opulent marble and chrome volumes of Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion are rendered depopulated and sinister. Arguably, all of these have their roots in the way that some horror film directors, not satisfied with the tired tropes of gothic mansions, have found horror in concrete.

Probably the first horror films to explore modernist spaces as the scenes of appalling crimes were the Italian giallo slashers of the 1970s and early 1980s. Made during the political chaos of the "Years of Lead", these films frequently took place in the high-modernist interiors of executive apartment blocks or private houses in the rich cities of northern Italy. The lurid reds and oranges of Verner Panton furniture, and the sharp edges of glass coffee tables, became a new vocabulary of horror, places where the human body was sliced up by the hard lines of modern design.

In giallo films, violence is treated with the same fastidious attention to detail as the layout of a Bauhaus home

Heading for demolition … a resident possessed by a demon in Ho Tzu Nyen's The Cloud of Unknowing. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist and Kiang Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong

– something that makes them perfect Instagram fodder. The most dramatic example of giallo modernism comes in Dario Argento's 1982 film Tenebrae, which mostly takes place in a remarkably unnerving brutalist house: the Villa Ronconi in the suburbs of Rome, designed by Saverio Busiri Vici in the early 70s. Its concrete grid is organised in such a complex fashion that inside and outside are completely scrambled, an apt setting for this story of a media-inspired serial killer.

The great director of modernist horror is David Cronenberg. His early features consistently used the brutalist buildings of his native Canada as the offices for sinister laboratories and corporations undertaking various appalling experiments. In Shivers, a parasitic STD is let loose on the residents of Nun's Island, an impeccably rational, Mies van der Rohe-designed steel and glass grid of luxury flats in Montreal; in The Brood, experiments that will lead to a woman producing murderous mutant children take place in the secluded, forested Somafree Institute of Psychoplasmics (filmed at the Kortright Centre for Conservation, outside Toronto); and in Scanners, psychic adolescents are trained to explode their enemies' heads at the offices of ConSec, which is actually the Futur Electronique Building on the outskirts of Montreal, an enigmatic brutalist block surrounded by nothing.

For Cronenberg, a peculiar if orthodox Freudian, these modernist spaces are all attempts to make rational creatures out of human beings whose minds and bodies are ungovernable and terrifying. His scientists' attempts to create logic only release chaos.

Any depiction of horror in the modernist block, however, has to reckon with Candyman, Bernard Rose's audacious horror classic on race and class in Chicago through the tale of a mythical, supernatural killer. Candyman has surely launched a thousand PhD theses – appropriately, for a film about academics – but at the heart of it is a return of the repressed in two modernist housing estates.

Graduate student Helen Lyle lives in a gorgeous high-rise flat in Lincoln Village (this is in fact Carl Sandburg Village, which, like its fictional equivalent, is a 1960s social housing project that was privatised and turned into condominiums). She becomes obsessed with the urban legend of the Candyman: the murderous ghost of Daniel Robitaille, a black painter who was tortured and lynched for forming a relationship with a white woman in the 1890s. He was killed, we are told, on the future site of Cabrini-Green Homes, an estate of red-brick and concrete grids just outside the city centre that was by then the most notorious modernist failure in the US (opened in 1957, the buildings were demolished in the 00s, and replaced with private housing). One of these high-rise estates, we are shown, can be viewed from the windows of the other.

Long before brutalist buildings became the objects of niche tourism, Helen goes on queasily voyeuristic excursions to Cabrini-Green to document the horrifically dilapidated towers, and their devastated surroundings – startlingly close to the shiny Miesian glass skyscrapers of the city centre – to take photographs and collect stories. Finding herself in what residents claim is the home of the Candyman, she is in an appalling refraction of her own spacious modernist condo, coated in graffiti, riddled with vermin, with its glass windows obscured by chicken wire. Outside Lincoln Village are tree-lined paths, benches and elegant 60s light-fittings, all covetable by today's modernism enthusiasts; outside Cabrini-Green are parking lots, freeways and a towering pile of waste. They're the same place, subjected to a radically different fate.

Tower of Terror no more … Trellick Tower. Photograph: Scott Barbour/Getty

Unlike the accounts of modernist housing that see it as something intrinsically alienating and sinister, Candyman's satire is not aimed at the buildings; as the contrast shows, they can be whatever we want them to be. Rather, it is a ferocious attack on the ways in which architecture is wrapped up in the US's monstrous inequalities of race and class. The legacies of slavery and what is not so much a legacy as a present of stark segregation continue to haunt the modernist blocks because their horrors have never actually ended. The two high-rise estates in the film are a perfect synecdoche for a system that can make a utopia and dystopia out of exactly the same design, depending on what class or race the residents were born into.

Here is the true irrationality, and the Candyman is an avenging, silky-voiced angel floating across both sides of the tracks. On the other side of the office blocks of Brindleyplace, visible from the Ikon Gallery, are the high-rise estates of Ladywood, one of the poorest places in the UK. Just like Helen Lyle, you can stare from the windows of one towards the other. As the Candyman trills to her: "I am the writing on the wall."

● Horror in the Modernist Block is at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, until 1 May.

'We're doubling down': how abortion advocates are building on midterm wins

Melody Schreiber

Jaelynn Smith, a freshman at Michigan State University, at a rally on election night last month. Proposal 3 was a ballot measure that will now codify abortion rights in Michigan. Photograph: Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters

Renee Bracey Sherman answers the phone and apologizes – is it OK if we speak while she drives? Like many abortion advocates, she tends to keep a packed schedule and talk at lightning speed – the next initiative, the next law, the next policy on the horizon. Ask advocates how they felt in June after the Dobbs decision sharply curtailed reproductive rights across the US, or in November after wins in the midterm elections signaled strong public support for abortion, and they'll answer immediately: We knew this was coming;but the fight's not over.

What Bracey Sherman – founder and executive director of We Testify, a group focused on the leadership and representation of people who have abortions – and her colleagues in the pro-choice movement don't spend much time doing is elaborating on the past, or how they mourned or celebrated, because it's already in the rearview window. Their eyes are laser-focused on the future.

"We're doubling down," Bracey Sherman said.

Abortion was a central issue in a midterm election that saw Democrats retain the Senate and relinquish only a narrow majority in the House. In Kentucky and Montana, voters rejected anti-abortion initiatives on the ballot; and in Michigan, California and Vermont, voters chose to establish reproductive rights in state law. Over the summer, Kansas voters similarly rejected a ballot measure to remove abortion rights from its constitution.

"When abortion was on the ballot, it won, so that was fantastic," said Elisa Wells, co-founder and co-director of Plan C, an organization that helps access abortion medication. Those wins "really demonstrate that legislators are out of touch with what the majority of Americans want. They support abortion access, and understand that it's basic, common medical care."

So pro-choice advocates are taking the fight to new areas, principally access to abortion care, which is now heavily restricted in many places, and support for abortion seekers in states that have criminalized it.

The focus is squarely on the states. For the next two years, with Congress divided, it's understood that little will get done at the federal level.

"The state level is probably where abortion rights advocates will need to work, and have had some success in the last year," said Shana Kushner Gadarian, professor of political science at Syracuse University.

Ballot initiatives were one of those real successes. It's important for organizers "to get things directly in front of voters, because they seem to be winning on that side", she said.

They were successful in two ways. First, reproductive health can be an issue that stretches across partisan lines, with Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike voicing some level of support for abortion – especially when it comes to opposition to total abortion bans.

But the Dobbs decision also drove a surge in voter registration, especially for Democrats, and it made abortion rights a more salient voting issue, even beyond ballot initiatives, Gadarian noted.

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That translated into results. Voters opposed anti-abortion candidates in several states: Arizona, Kansas, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin elected Democratic governors who could veto anti-abortion legislation, while Republicans in Arizona, North Carolina and Wisconsin failed to reach a supermajority in both the state senate and house, making it impossible to override such a veto.

That's a strong message to candidates in future elections. "Politicians care about re-election," Gadarian said. "They want to make sure that they're not going so far ahead of the public that they are going to get punished during the next election cycle." That could mean instituting less-encompassing laws in conservative states, such as Florida's 15-week restrictions, she said.

Anti-abortion advocates went too far by creating state-level bans, which are extremely unpopular, and even pushing for a nationwide ban, said Bracey Sherman. "They overplayed their hand on everything." There was also an unprecedented number of candidates and elected officials who were open about their own abortions – "a historic moment" for abortion support, she said.

Advocates in at least 10 states with restrictive abortion policies are now considering ballot initiatives. In Oklahoma and South Dakota, abortion advocates have asked to add initiatives to 2024 ballots; while several key leaders in Missouri, which has a near-total abortion ban, are up for re-election in two years, and the state could also see ballot initiatives in 2024.

New ballot initiatives could enshrine abortion rights into state law in New York, New Jersey and Ohio, a proactive move that several states have taken. In some states, citizens can put forth the proposals to be added to the ballot, or they may ask their state lawmakers to add them.

Next in Kentucky is a legal challenge to the near-total abortion ban after six weeks that has no exceptions for rape or incest and that only allows abortions under a licensed physician's care and if life-saving organs are threatened. Even if that challenge is successful, the next ban in place is on pregnancies after 15 weeks – so the fight would need to continue, advocates say.

One important takeaway from places like Kansas, the first state to put abortion rights to a vote this summer, is that long-term community organizing and education was highly effective. Other grassroots organizations are taking note. The Afiya Center, a reproductive justice organization in Texas that had to stop its work as an abortion fund due to new state law, is focusing more on community mobilization, voter registration and education campaigns.

"We are actually launching a voter engagement campaign at the top of the year, called 'I am a reproductive justice voter,'" said Cerita Burrell, director of programs at the Afiya Center. "We need to educate folks more on the electoral process. It really comes down to policy and lawmakers – getting the right people in office that understand the right to full bodily autonomy."

Elsewhere, the pro-choice movement is not just entrenching but pushing as many laws as they can, "and they're sticking", Wells said. "So why don't we go on the offensive?"

Some groups are focusing on shield laws to protect providers who prescribe abortion medication via telehealth. In July, Massachusetts passed a sweeping law that shields providers who offer care to residents of states where it's restricted. "With this new law in place, we're helping get a group together of providers who would then be able to legally provide telehealth care into states that restrict access," Wells said. Other states should do the same, she said.

Plan C advocates for exactly that, as well as pushing to remove federal regulatory limitations on medication abortion. Some international organizations like AidAccess already ship to places where state law restricts abortion.

Abortion pills are "safer than Tylenol, safer than Viagra – it doesn't need to be as highly regulated and medicalized as it is". Wells said. "Why are these restrictions still standing on this extremely safe and effective technology? It's politics."

She would like to see abortion medications available over the counter. "Our philosophy has always been you really need to push the envelope and try these things, because they might stand up," Wells said.

Courtrooms, not coat hangers

With medication and self-managed abortion, safety is not the concern it was in pre-Roe America. The current challenges are not about back-alley abortions and coat hangers, advocates say.

"Self-managed abortion now does not look like what it looked like in the 70s," said Jennifer Lim, the communications and media director of Indigenous Women Rising, a reproductive justice organization that runs an abortion fund. "We don't lean in towards, 'We won't go back', because we don't have to – the future looks very different than what it used to. Abortion pills are very safe, they're very effective. But the criminalization aspect is a whole different part of it."

Criminalizing pregnancy was a rising threat even before Roe was overturned, and the Dobbs decision could see prosecutions jump.

So legal assistance in a rapidly changing and often confusing landscape has become a huge new area of focus.

"We need to stop criminalizing people for their pregnancy outcomes," Wells said. "We need to not have criminal charges falling on a person who needs healthcare in our country."

And those who have been marginalized – people of color, people living in poverty, gender-variant folks, younger people, immigrants – are the most likely to experience challenges like these. "It's people who lack access and resources and face obstacles who are left with fewer options," said Jill Adams, executive director of If/When/How, a legal resource for reproductive justice.

The organization's Repro Legal Helpline has seen a 14-fold increase in inquiries since the Dobbs decision. "We expect that higher level of interest to maintain, and we have been staffing up," Adams said. The jumble of reproductive laws in the US is puzzling to anyone attempting to navigate care, Adams said, and many callers at first "need to understand what the legal landscape is – what, if any, legal risks they face so that they can make the decision that's best for them," she said.

If/When/How also has a Repro Legal Defense Fund to provide financial assistance to people who have been criminalized for abortion, including partners, friends and family members. The fund supports pre-trial release, with bail bonds and bail alternatives, as well as the full costs of legal defense. More money is going into that, too, Adams said.

Abortion was a "hot topic" in the midterm elections, with politicians relying on the issue to turn out voters, Lim said. "How do we get folks to stay engaged and understand that this is a long-term battle?" she asked. "We don't want to lose momentum."

GSK shares surge as US judge dismisses Zantac cancer claims

Joe Middleton and agencies

Shares in drug firms GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi surged after a US judge dismissed thousands of lawsuits claiming that the heartburn drug Zantac caused cancer.

GSK's shares jumped as much as 14% in early trading, while Sanofi's stock jumped nearly 6% in mid-morning trading.

The US district judge Robin Rosenberg in West Palm Beach, Florida, dismissed about 50,000 claims in federal court on the basis that they were not backed by sound science.

The ruling can still be appealed against, and the decision does not directly affect tens of thousands of similar cases pending in state courts around the country.

GSK said it would continue to defend itself vigorously, including against all claims brought at the state level.

Although it is unlikely investors will assume the Zantac risk has completely dissipated, Wall Street analysts suggested the probability and scale of future Zantac damages via other legal routes do look significantly lower.

▲ *The share price of the British pharmaceutical company has been significantly affected by the ongoing legislation surrounding the drug. Photograph: Ben Stansall/AFP/Getty Images*

The company, run by Dame Emma Walmsley, split in two earlier this year, floating its Sensodyne to Panadol consumer arm on the stock market as Haleon. The Zantac litigation has weighed heavily on its share price.

Originally marketed by a forerunner of GSK, the medicine has been sold by several companies at different times, including Pfizer, Boehringer Ingelheim and Sanofi, as well as a plethora of generic drugmakers.

It was first approved in 1983 and became the world's bestselling medicine in 1988, and one of the first drugs to top $1bn in annual sales.

Concerns around Zantac containing potential cancer-causing impurities started to emerge in 2018.

By 2019, some manufacturers and pharmacies halted sales of the drug over concerns that its active ingredient, ranitidine, degraded over time to form a chemical called NDMA.

While NDMA is found in low levels in food and water, it is known to cause cancer in larger amounts.

In 2020, the US health regulator pulled all remaining Zantac versions off the market.

Lawsuits began piling up soon after recalls began from people who said they developed cancer after taking Zantac.

The drugmakers, citing scientific consensus, have repeatedly asserted that Zantac does not cause cancer.

The AJ Bell investment director, Russ Mould,said: "This outcome is probably the best GSK could have hoped for given how comprehensively the judge in the case dismissed the plaintiffs' arguments.

"While there is some risk of an appeal, and there are other cases outstanding, GSK will be sitting a lot more comfortably than it was before this judgment was handed down."

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The Guardian view on Sunak and the strikes: misreading the mood of the nation

Editorial

The replacement of the hapless Liz Truss by Rishi Sunak was widely assumed to herald the return of a "grown-up", managerial style of politics to Downing Street. With the markets duly placated by Jeremy Hunt's autumn statement, some senior Tories even began to worry that Sunakian stability and fiscal orthodoxy would be too boring a platform on which to face Labour at the next election.

But it turns out that, outside the City, Britons aren't bored by Mr Sunak's fledgling premiership; they are furious and insurgent. Rail and postal workers, nurses, ambulance workers and civil servants are currently planning to go on strike in December. They may be joined by teachers and junior doctors in the new year. In all, more than a million members of the workforce may withdraw their labour in the lead-up to Christmas – numbers reminiscent of the "winter of discontent" in 1978/9. This is despite lower levels of union membership and far more stringent rules governing strike action.

Disastrously, after being buffeted into U-turns on housebuilding and onshore windfarms by internal party revolts, Mr Sunak appears to see the strikes as a chance to confound those critics who accuse him of being

▲ 'At prime minister's questions on Wednesday, Rishi Sunak challenged Keir Starmer to back even tougher anti-strike legislation.' Photograph: Jessica Taylor/UK Parliament/AFP/Getty Images

weak. At prime minister's questions on Wednesday, he challenged Keir Starmer to back even tougher anti-strike legislation, to be introduced next year. As the transport secretary, Mark Harper, has admitted, this will not affect industrial action this winter, but that is not the point. The government's current strategy is to whip up a confrontation with the unions in the belief that the public will be on its side.

This "who governs?" approach famously ended badly for Edward Heath, who lost an election called on that basis in 1974. But Mr Sunak no doubt prefers to dwell on Margaret Thatcher's triumph in 1979, when the argument that unions were "holding the country to ransom" – a line repeated by ministers this week – contributed to a Tory landslide. Unfortunately for the prime minister, that was then.

By the end of the 1970s, much of the population agreed that unions had become too powerful. Forty years on, as Mr Sunak promises to legislate to "protect" the public, popular sympathy for the right to strike has actually grown since June. The reasons for that go beyond particular disputes, and deeper than the current cost of living crisis. There is a widespread and accurate public perception that, since the crash, the country has witnessed a boom in unearned asset wealth and pay at the top, combined with stagnating or falling real-terms wages for almost everyone else. A decade of underinvestment in the public sector has also fuelled a perception that much of the country just doesn't work properly any more. Responsibility for this dysfunctional state of affairs is deemed not to lie with 1970s-style militant trade unionists, but with successive Conservative governments.

If only from an instinct of self-preservation, a wise administration would recognise this backdrop and negotiate, and compromise, accordingly. Ahead of a winter recession that strikes will only deepen, this would also be the right thing to do for the country. But for now, Mr Sunak's fiscal conservatism means he will not countenance such an approach. Instead, he appears determined to foment social strife in the hope of isolating Labour and uniting his own party with some retro rhetoric. That is misguided and irresponsible opportunism, not grown-up politics. It also seriously misreads the mood of the nation.

The Guardian view on Israel's threat within: rightwing extremism in government

Editorial

The crisis in the Holy Land is once again at "boiling point", with blood being spilled on both sides. Tor Wennesland, the UN's peace envoy, did not mince his words to the security council this week. The rising death toll in the West Bank, the worst since 2006, is roiling the waters. Since January, about 140 Palestinians have been killed in this territory, nearly all by Israeli forces. Palestinian attacks targeting Israelis have left 30 dead.

Days earlier, Mr Wennesland had been "horrified" by the fatal shooting of an unarmed Palestinian man during a scuffle with an Israeli border police officer. The macabre video of the killing revealed he was right to be alarmed. Yet rather than upbraiding the officer for a public execution, the incoming national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, from the far-right Jewish Power party, hailed him as a hero.

The Religious Zionism bloc, led by Mr Ben-Gvir and the Jewish supremacist Bezalel Smotrich, is now the third-largest group in the Knesset. Harbouring racists and homophobes, it was the big winner in last month's elections. The losers were Israeli democracy and the Palestinians. Yaakov Katz, editor-in-chief of the Jerusalem Post, has good reason to call Mr Ben-Gvir "the modern

▲ The Likud chairman, Benjamin Netanyahu (left), and the Religious Zionist party leader, Bezalel Smotrich, stand behind the Israeli PM, Yair Lapid, in the Knesset. Photograph: Tsafrir Abayov/AP

Israeli version of an American white supremacist and a European fascist". Mr Ben-Gvir, who has been convicted of racist incitement and support for terrorism, already has tense relations with Israel's Arab minority. As he has repeatedly pledged to relocate Bedouins and Palestinian Israeli citizens to neighbouring Arab states, much worse could be in store for them.

The proximate cause for violent extremists in Israel's government is Benjamin Netanyahu. On trial for corruption – charges that Mr Netanyahu denies – he seems willing to pay any price to end the cases against him. In return for an assault on Israel's justice system through new legislation advanced by his far-right and ultra-Orthodox allies, Mr Netanyahu appears to be reshaping government to their advantage – notably handing over virtually untrammelled powers in the occupied territories. He seeks to ride the radical wave surging through Jewish Israeli society. About 60% of such voters now consider themselves rightwing – up from 46% in 2019. Among young Israelis, support tops 70%.

These trends should worry Israel. Since 1967, the country has given itself plausible deniability over deepening an illegal occupation in the West Bank by claiming the region was under an apolitical, military-administered legal regime that respects international law. This, said successive Israeli governments, was a temporary solution until a permanent deal was reached with the Palestinians. Putting Mr Smotrich's party in charge threatens to expose this as a charade, confirming that Israeli occupation is a form of apartheid.

Mr Netanyahu appears to be betting the world will blink first. His friends in the Gulf are sticking by him. The Biden administration says it will judge the new government by its policies, not its personalities. But the far-right march to their own drum. Mr Smotrich supports the annexation of the West Bank, the expansion of settlements and the demolition of Palestinian homes. Mr Ben-Gvir plans a provocative ministerial "visit" to Haram al-Sharif, site of the third-holiest shrine in Islam, under the pretence that Israeli Jews are struggling for their religious rights. If such words become deeds, then a Palestinian uprising – a third intifada – won't be far away. This is a dismal thought, but it seems to be where the unfortunate evolution of Israeli politics is heading.

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Sundance 2023: Anne Hathaway, Chiwetel Ejiofor and Julia Louis-Dreyfus lead lineup

Benjamin Lee

Next month's Sundance film festival will see a return to in-person premieres with new films featuring Anne Hathaway, Chiwetel Ejiofor and Julia Louis-Dreyfus.

The Utah-based festival has been online only since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and while this year's was set to be a physical-digital hybrid, the rise of the Omicron variant meant that it was cancelled at the last minute. There will still be a digital component to 2023's edition but a large number of films will only be available to watch on the ground.

The Lady Macbeth director William Oldroyd will unveil his much-anticipated follow-up, the psychological thriller Eileen. Set in the 1960s, it stars Thomasin McKenzie as a secretary who develops a friendship with a glamorous new counselor at the prison where she works, played by Anne Hathaway. But things take a dark turn when a secret is revealed. It's based on the highly acclaimed book by Otessa Moshfegh, which was shortlisted for the Man Booker prize.

▲ Anne Hathaway, Chiwetel Ejiofor and Julia Louis-Dreyfus. Photograph: Rex/Shutterstock

Oscar nominee Chiwetel Ejiofor will also head to the mountains with the sci-fi comedy The Pod Generation, which sees him and Emilia Clarke star as a couple using technology to start a family with an artificial womb.

Nicole Holofcener, whose 2006 film Friends With Money opened the festival that year, will return with You Hurt My Feelings, a comedy that reteams her with Enough Said's Julia Louis-Dreyfus. The Veep star will play a novelist whose life is thrown into disarray when she overhears her husband criticising her writing.

An adaptation of Kristen Roupenian's viral short story Cat Person will also premiere, starring Coda's Emilia Jones and Succession's Nicholas Braun. "They've kind of turned it into a thriller," Jones said in an interview last year. Brandon Cronenberg will also return to the festival after 2020's Possessor with the gory resort-set horror Infinity Pool starring Alexander Skarsgård and Mia Goth. The Thoroughbreds director Cory Finley will premiere his new film Landscape With Invisible Hand starring Tiffany Haddish about a future in which aliens take over and control the world's economy.

Films in competition include bodybuilding drama Magazine Dreams starring Jonathan Majors, Sometimes I Think About Dying starring Daisy Ridley as a suicidal office worker and relationship thriller Fair Play led by Bridgerton's Phoebe Dynevor.

The festival will also see a large selection of major documentaries premiere. Victim/Suspect is focused on women making claims of sexual assault but being mistreated and misrepresented by the system, Food and Country is about the broken food system in the US and Plan C centres on a grassroots organisation aiming to help women gain access to abortion pills . There will also be documentaries focused on figures including Little Richard, Michael J Fox, Judy Blume and Brooke Shields.

This year will see 101 films premiere with 53% of them directed by one or more film-makers who identify as women and 45% from film-makers of colour.

▲ Emilia Jones and Nicholas Braun in Cat Person. Photograph: Sundance Institute

"Maintaining an essential place for artists to express themselves, take risks, and for visionary stories to endure and entertain is distinctly Sundance," said Robert Redford, the founder and president of the Sundance Institute. "The festival continues to foster these values and connections through independent storytelling. We are honored to share the compelling selection of work at this year's festival from distinct perspectives and unique voices."

The Sundance film festival will take place on 19-29 January.

Colbert on Herschel Walker: 'self-aware cinderblock' who 'didn't belong in the Senate'

Guardian staff

Stephen Colbert

Though the Late Show taped hours before results were tallied in the Georgia runoff election, Stephen Colbert projected that "self-aware cinderblock" Herschel Walker "did not belong in the Senate".

"The US Senate is no place for people whose brains don't work because of football injuries," he said on Tuesday evening. "It's a place for people whose brains don't work because they're 1,000 years old."

Walker, the Republican backed by Donald Trump, went into election day trailing in the polls behind Democratic rival Raphael Warnock, who was declared the victor late on Tuesday night. "It's not like Herschel didn't try," said Colbert. "He spent years fathering as many voters as possible."

In other news, former Capitol police officers who defended lawmakers during the January 6 insurrection received a Congressional Gold Medal on Tuesday. Several family members in attendance refused to shake hands with the GOP lawmakers Mitch McConnell and Kevin McCarthy because, as one put it: "they're just two-faced … I'm just tired of them standing there and saying how wonderful the Capitol police is and then they turn around and go down to Mar-a-Lago and kiss his ring."

"And by ring, of course, she means his … how do I put this delicately … butthole," Colbert quipped.

And a jury in New York found two of Trump's companies guilty of 17 counts of tax fraud and other crimes. "Oh Santa, you got my letter!" Colbert exclaimed. "I've never been more excited to talk about complex financial crimes."

▲ Stephen Colbert on Herschel Walker: 'The US Senate is no place for people whose brains don't work because of football injuries. It's a place for people whose brains don't work because they're 1,000 years old.' Photograph: YouTube

The verdict acknowledged a series of schemes that included under-the-table perks like luxury cars and free apartments. "Because nothing makes you look less guilty than giving all of your execs a getaway car and a hideout," Colbert noted.

Trevor Noah

On the Daily Show, Trevor Noah also touched on the Trump Organization's conviction on 17 counts of tax fraud and other financial crimes. "And you know what that means – Donald Trump is going to prison! To visit all the lower-ranking people who did this without his knowledge or permission," he said.

"Because we all know that's how that works in the world, right?" he continued. "All the successes in the Trump Organization, they're due to the genius of Donald Trump. All the crimes, he had no idea."

Noah then pivoted to talking about wage theft by large corporations, or when companies avoid paying workers what they are legally owed for time spent working. Several companies have been legally forced to pay stolen wages via class-action lawsuits: McDonald's agreed to pay $26m to settle accusations of wage theft in a class-action lawsuit by employees in California. Walmart was ordered to pay $4.6m in backpay and damages to more than 4,500 employees. Amazon settled a wage theft lawsuit for $8.2m, and KrispyKreme was ordered to pay $1.1m after investigators found widespread and frequent failure to pay workers.

"Huh, that's so strange – all of this theft occurred, but there's no mention of anyone going to jail. But then how will they learn their lesson?" Noah mocked. "Oh and before you say, 'Trevor, you can't put a corporation in jail' – says who? They always say corporations are people, so why doesn't America treat them like American people?

"Every single time a company gets busted stealing their workers' wages, you know what they should do? They should say that the company's headquarters need to be taken to prison," he added. "You hear that, Amazon? Same-day delivery is gonna be a lot harder when you have to smuggle that air fryer in your butthole."

Jimmy Kimmel

And in Los Angeles, Jimmy Kimmel recapped the final campaign push of the Georgia run-off between Walker and Warnock. "Usually during the final push, [Walker] is miles away from the hospital at a Waffle House telling a waitress she's the one," he joked.

"Even though he's a beloved local football hero, Herschel Walker has not exactly inspired passion among Republican voters," he continued. "You go down a list of what their party supposedly values most" and it doesn't seem to align. Family values? "He's a serial domestic abuser with more kids than a Dave & Buster's on a Saturday at noon." Charity? "He claimed his company gave 15% of their profits to charity; three of the four charities listed on his website said he gave nothing, the other said no comment."

Pro-life? "He was Planned Parenthood's customer of year, I think." Pro-law enforcement? "He lied about being a cop, an FBI agent, exaggerated his non-existent military service." Pro-Georgia? "He himself mistakenly admitted he lives in Texas, not Georgia. But he did play football, that is true."

Emancipation: the true story behind Will Smith's slavery drama

David Smith in Washington

When Will Smith made a guest appearance last week on Comedy Central's The Daily Show, there was no avoiding The Slap – his eruption of anger at comedian Chris Rock during the Oscars. But first, host Trevor Noah wanted to talk about Smith's latest film: "You play one of the most famous unknown people … from America's history."

That person is today known as "whipped Peter" or by his given name as an enslaved man, Gordon. A photograph showing his scarred back after his escape from a Louisiana plantation in the 1860s became one of the first viral images, displaying the brutality of slavery to a world that could no longer look away. Peter's story is the inspiration for Smith's comeback movie, Emancipation, which begins streaming on Apple TV+ on Friday.

The backdrop is the American civil war. On 1 January 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation declaring "that all persons held as slaves" within states that had seceded from the union "are, and henceforward shall be free", though it left slavery untouched in loyal border states. The proclamation also announced the acceptance of Black men into the Union army.

Mary Elliott, curator of American slavery at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, says in an online call: "This war was about slavery, about the ability to maintain slavery, and Lincoln was about keeping the union together.

"Ultimately, he passes the Emancipation Proclamation which freed enslaved Black people only in the rebelling states. That's a very important distinction. A state like Maryland did not leave the union and still maintained slavery. That meant slavery hadn't ended throughout the whole nation."

▲ *A still from Emancipation. 'His story is powerful because you can't talk about slavery without talking about freedom.' Photograph: Quantrell Colbert/Courtesy of Apple*

Peter was in one of the southern states that had rebelled. He was among 40 enslaved people on John and Bridget Lyons' expansive cotton and onion plantation in St Landry parish, Louisiana. They were subjected to unspeakable cruelty.

In March 1863 Peter staged an extraordinary escape. For 10 days he was on the run, hunters and dogs at his back, disguising his scent with onions and navigating the treacherous bayou. Forty miles later, he finally reached the Union army stationed in Baton Rouge – he was finally a free man.

But before enlisting in a Black regiment, he was examined by military doctors. A witness told the New York Daily Tribune newspaper: "He pulled down the pile of dirty rags that half concealed his back. It sent a thrill of horror to every white person present, but the few blacks who were waiting paid but little attention to the sad spectacle, such terrible scenes being painfully familiar to them all."

The shocking sight was captured by New Orleans-based photographers William McPherson and J Oliver. In the portrait, which became known as "The Scourged Back", Peter sits with hand on hip, back to the camera, glancing over his shoulder. His skin is riven with a crisscrossed map of keloid scars from a whipping by a plantation overseer, an act of abuse that Peter said left him in bed for two months.

According to the New York Daily Tribune, he told the Union troops on 2 April 1863: "Overseer Artayou Carrier whipped me – I don't remember the whipping. I was two months in bed, sore from the whipping and salt brine, which Overseer put on my back. By and by my senses began to come – they said I was sort of crazy, and tried to shoot everybody."

The photo was published in Harper's Magazine and created a sensation. It was circulated fervently around the country by abolitionists and published worldwide. Unlike written accounts of slavery, all too often dismissed as unverifiable, the photograph provided incontrovertible and visceral evidence.

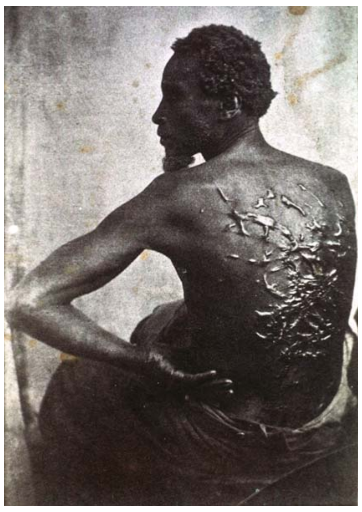
Theodore Tilton, a newspaper editor, wrote that it "should be multiplied by the hundred thousand and scattered over the states … If seeing is believing – and it is in the immense majority of cases – seeing this card would be equivalent to believing things of the slave states which Northern men and women would move heaven and earth to abolish!"

The image can be seen a forerunner of mobile phone videos that now capture police brutality against people of colour, spurring the Black Lives Matter movement. Elliott adds: "People try to tell themselves things to make themselves like, 'Well, slavery wasn't so bad. The genteel enslaver and the enslaved who loved and cared for their enslaver.' But let's just be real. Legally there were opportunities for people to maim a person, even kill a person who was enslaved, who they saw as doing something wrong.

"There were laws in the colonial period where you could split someone's nose, cut off a limb for different degrees of what the enslavers saw as an egregious act. Legally you could murder someone. There were whipping posts – you could whip someone in public. You can read about it but to see it, that's a whole different thing. That's why you can't turn away. This is real, this man's back, those lines, those raised lacerations tell a visual story that you can't turn away from."

Peter signed up to serve as a soldier in the Louisiana Native Guard, a regiment of the Union army made up entirely of free Black recruits, in an effort to liberate others. He was reported to have fought bravely in the Union assault on Port Hudson in July 1863.

Elliott continues: "That was important for him to be able to do that. His story is powerful because you can't talk about slavery without talking about freedom. There's always this desire for freedom. When people say, 'Oh, another slave film', 'Oh, you're going to talk about slavery', well, guess what? I'm also going to talk about freedom."



▲ *A photograph taken by C Seaver in 1863 that shows the former Louisiana slave named Gordon. Photograph: C Seaver/Associated Press*

The trail then goes cold: nothing further is known about Peter's life. But the photo of him that hangs in the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery continues to agitate, haunt, move, reprove and inspire.

Elliott, 56, who has interviewed Smith about the new film, reflects: "When I see that photograph it makes me think about how it's important that we're in touch with our humanity by recognising the inhumanity and we recognise that, with Peter's story, the strength of a man is endurance, what he experienced, but also the strength of that man is to see the fight through all the way through.

"So now you've entered the Union army camp and you're going to join the fight. To me Black people who did that didn't just free themselves from slavery. They freed the nation from the bondage of slavery and that cannot be lost on anyone."

Emancipation is now out in selected cinemas and will be available on Apple TV+ on 9 December

Infinite lives: the company saving old arcade machines

Keith Stuart

On a rural industrial estate five miles outside Honiton, under the flight path of a nearby aerodrome, sits a rather nondescript warehouse. Only one feature marks it out: in front is a graveyard of stripped arcade cabinets, slowly rotting in the cold and damp.

I am here to visit Play Leisure, a company that restores and sells old arcade games. It has a compelling TikTok account where it shares new discoveries – a recent post showed off a Deadstorm Pirates machine with its enormous sit-in cabinet and giant cinematic display. I've dragged my friend and fellow arcade fanatic Joao Sanches along, and now I'm feeling nervous and responsible because, walking up to the unmarked entrance, I've no idea if they will have anything interesting in stock after our 90-minute drive.

▲ *Play Leisure, a company that restores and sells old arcade games. Photograph: Joao Diniz Sanches*

But peering inside, I spot it immediately, sat there in the cramped reception area amid piles of cardboard boxes: a pristine 1992 Street Fighter II machine, the backboard sporting a wild illustration of Ryu kicking Ken, each special feature on the playfield named after famous Street Fighter attacks. I almost gasp.

Matt Conridge, the owner of Play Leisure, has always been interested in arcade machines. "Like a lot of us in our 30s and 40s, it comes from back when I was a kid," he explains as he comes to greet us. "I used to visit arcades at seaside resorts – places like Dawlish and Lynmouth."

Three years ago, Conridge was running a video game bar in Bideford, north Devon, when Covid hit. Facing disaster, he decided to close up and use his contacts in the arcade scene to pivot into a new project: restoration. He rented a warehouse, employed a small team of specialist engineers and started buying up all the old coin-ops he could get his hands on. The plan was to repair them and sell them on to private collectors and retro theme bars, after the pandemic.

"Back then, we were only buying small quantities so it usually came from collectors. Now we take them on an industrial scale," says Conridge. "At the moment, with what's happening in the economy, arcades are cutting costs, getting rid of some of the lower performing machines that cost them more to run than they make in revenue. We get clearances from arcades, play centres, trampoline parks … "

▲ *'It comes from back when I was a kid' … Matt Conridge, the owner of Play Leisure. Photograph: Joao Diniz Sanches*

Another problem is that older coin-ops require specialist engineers to maintain them. "A lot of the people who used to build and service these machines have retired," says Conridge.

Continued *on page 30*

Continued *from page 29*

"That knowledge is dying."

Matt takes us through to the main warehouse space, where we're momentarily stunned again. Crammed into a space about the size of a tennis court are 200-odd arcade machines from throughout gaming history. The first thing I spot is the twin cabinet version of Sega's brilliant 1995 racing game Manx TT Super Bike, which allowed players to sit on reproduction motorcycles and compete against each other along narrow country lanes. Nearby there's Konami's thrilling Silent Scope 2: Fatal Judgement, complete with its authentic sniper rifle controller, and further back in this electronic labyrinth is a twin cab of Final Furlong, the crazy Namco horse racing game that you control by sitting on a plastic horse and jumping up and down.

I'm taken back to the first time I visited Japan in 2000 to attend the Tokyo Game Show. I walked into an arcade in Akihabara and saw salarymen on their lunch hour, dozens of them in rows playing this game, grimacing with effort in the darkness.

The machines arrive in huge shipping containers and Conridge is never quite sure what games he'll find or what condition they will be in. "The problem is, arcade operators don't generate any more money by keeping machine internals clean," he says. "If you open it up and start cleaning the inside you may end up causing issues. We've opened them and found coins, tools … We found a porno mag in the back of a machine once. We've just got one from Blackpool, a crane machine that dispensed sweets – it's been left for a few years and the sweets have fallen inside and rotted, then the flies got in there … ugh."

Will they clean that? "No," laughs Conridge. "We'll sell it off and let someone else deal with it."

Conridge is however, conscientious about whom he sells brittle older machines to. "There are some retro machines that we advise people not to buy unless they're technically minded," he says. "There's a pinball machine, a 1966 electromechanical model we're just about to put on sale, and we'll refuse to sell that to nine out of 10 people who contact us because we know it won't be suitable for them. These machines are like classic cars: they are specialist pieces of equipment and need constant care. If I sell it to someone who just wants a working machine, they'll be fed up after five minutes – we've got to choose the right customer for it. Someone who is able to tinker."

It's not just ancient pinball machines that are problematic. The big video arcade games of the 1990s – the technical peak of the industry – often used proprietary hardware that is simply impossible to replace or reproduce. "The Sega Model arcade boards used custom Lockheed Martin chips, which you just can't source," explains Chris, the lead engineer. "We have to decide whether to harvest parts from less interesting games and use them to resupply classics like Sega Rally." Around the outskirts of the warehouse space, there are shelves groaning under the weight of esoteric parts, haphazardly piled or collected in boxes.

Adding to the value of these machines now is the fact that arcades historically dumped old units when they stopped being profitable. "Ten to 15 years ago companies just didn't foresee that there would be any interest from collectors," says Conridge. "We just sold an Addams Family pinball machine for £10,000 – that would have been chucked in a skip 15 years ago. People didn't expect anyone would want them."

This was especially true of larger speciality machines, such as rhythm action games, with their bulky floor pads and complicated controllers, and driving games with their realistic race car cabinets. Not only did they take up valuable floor space, they were expensive to maintain. Their growing rarity represents an interesting challenge for Play Leisure, because games like Dance Mania and Guitar Hero are exactly the sorts of machines that the new era of retro gaming bars – such as the NQ64 chain, which has just taken on £2m of funding – are looking for: not only are they fun to play in a bar environment, they're fun to watch, too. "Dance Mania is now a £3k machine," Conridge says.

When cabinets arrive, their condition is assessed. For Conridge there is a delicate balance between restoration and preservation. He shows me a Point Blank machine that's just come in: Namco's entertaining light gun shooter, which was also popular on the PlayStation, is a currently a hit with buyers. He will aim to repair these machines whatever state they arrive in – even though the guns themselves, with their delicate recoil mechanic, are often busted beyond repair ("they get really smashed by kids in the arcade").

On this cabinet, the lavishly illustrated decals on the sides are peeling off: do they change the artwork for a modern reproduction? "If we do, it will look better but it won't be original," says Conridge. "It's a challenge. We don't tend to sell perfect-looking machines. When we went into arcades as children, the machines would have cigarette burns – that's how you remember them. There's a certain charm to that."

Some arcade cabinets are not economically viable to repair, but that doesn't mean they're unsellable. "We sell quite a lot of project machines," he says. "For a collector working in their garage, that's fine. We had a Star Wars 1982 Atari machine come in about 14 months ago. We put it on TikTok and Facebook – someone rang and they were desperate for it. It was nice to save this original machine from being scrapped."

If they can't be repaired, they're stripped for parts: circuit boards, cathode ray monitors, joysticks, motors. Almost none of these are manufactured any more, so they're all saved. Even completely stripped cabinets can have value: people often use them as a shell for their own arcade machines, using a PC and LED monitor. "Our customers can be really creative," says Conridge. "We have people turning them into cocktail cabinets, stands for DVD players and games consoles. It's nice because they're not ending up in a landfill site – they're getting another life."

Conridge reckons half his machines go to retro bars and modern arcades. The rest are bought by private collectors. There's a highly active arcade-collecting community, based around Discord servers and forums such as UKVAC, and Covid brought in a lot of new customers who started building gaming dens in the midst of lockdown.

Besides retro pinball tables and 1990s hits, the big sellers are attached to film or TV licences. Play Leisure has sold three Star Wars Battle Pods, really big immersive machines, for £10,000 each. An Aerosmith-branded arcade game named Revolution X will sell for £1,500, an X-Files pinball table for £3,500. There's an odd market too for old coin-pushing machines, mostly thanks to the TV quiz show Tipping Point and the growing popularity of TikTok accounts that specialise in coin-pushing live streams.

Joao and I spend the whole day here, snaking between the machines, peering into their exposed innards. We photograph everything. A long time ago we worked together on the video game magazine Edge, often reporting on arcade shows – these machines, which are now antiques, were the newest, hottest tech when we started our careers.

And before that, as a kid, I hung out in arcades in the 1980s. Donkey Kong, Defender, Space Harrier, Out Run; a pocket full of 10 pence coins, a whole day to waste. It is bittersweet to see the machines here, their CRT monitors cracked or missing, light gun holsters worn and split.

It is good that these things are being saved. To many of us, these are more than just disposable commercial products: they are works of art containing within them the experiences of thousands of players, my own included.

As Ukraine's culture minister, I'm asking you to boycott Tchaikovsky until this war is over

Oleksandr Tkachenko

Russia isn't just physically attacking Ukraine; it is also trying to destroy our culture and memory. In the occupied territories, Ukrainian libraries have been liquidated, the word "Ukraine" has been erased, and Ukrainian museums have been destroyed. Our ministry of culture and information policy has recorded more than 800 cases of destruction: monuments and works of art, museums, valuable historical buildings.

This war is a civilisational battle over culture and history. On 5 September this year, Vladimir Putin signed a decree that refers to the "Russian peace". The Kremlin made clear in the document that culture was a tool and even a weapon in the hands of the government, and that it would actively use all the opportunities available to it, from promoting Russian ballet to protecting the rights of Russian speakers abroad, in order to advance its interests.

In the Kremlin's mind, the world is divided between "traditional values" and "pseudo values". The latter are a liberal threat to the former, and an irreconcilable fight is taking place between the two. The Kremlin is putting itself forward as the global leader of traditional values, claiming that its nation is built upon them. After Putin signed this document, he made it very clear he saw Russian culture as an instrument of his nation's imperialist politics.

▲ *'Despite Putin's attempts, this war has opened a window of opportunity for Ukrainians to be seen and heard.' Ukrainian opera singer Liudmyla Monastyrska performing at the BBC Proms at London's Royal Albert Hall, 31 July 2022. Photograph: Mark Allan/BBC/PA*

Russian culture has been used by members of the Kremlin to justify their terrible war. Sergey Lavrov, the foreign minister, recently cited Alexander Pushkin's poem To the Slanderers of Russia on television. The broadcast featured footage of the G7 meeting, an image of Joe Biden against the background of the US flag, and symbols of Russian glory. The minister ended his speech with the following words from the peom: "Leave us alone: you're unacquainted. With suchlike bloody sacred tablets; This family, domestic feud. Is alien, obscure to you."

Putin insists that Ukraine and Russia are "one nation", while deliberately trying to destroy everything related to Ukraine. Despite his attempts, this war has opened a window of opportunity for Ukrainians to be seen and heard. Through pain and tragedy, we are rediscovering Ukrainian culture. The general public knows that the famous Christmas hymn Carol of the Bells is of Ukrainian origin: it is the Ukrainian folk melody Shchedryk, from which the brilliant Ukrainian composer Mykola Leontovych created a world masterpiece. Big celebrations are planned this month to honour the anniversary of Shchedryk.

Today, Ukrainian melodies and voices sound powerfully on the world's most prestigious stages – be it the Royal Opera House in London, the Metropolitan Opera in New York, or La Scala in Milan. Ukrainian opera singers are among the best in the world. Earlier this year, Liudmyla Monastyrska replaced the Russian soprano Anna Netrebko, who withdrew from the Met Opera after refusing to denounce Putin, in the main part of Turandot.

Boycotting Russian culture is an important step. We're not talking about cancelling Tchaikovsky, but rather about pausing performances of his works until Russia ceases its bloody invasion. Ukrainian cultural venues have already done this with him and other Russian composers. We're calling on our allies to do the same. Already, many of the theatres and cultural venues that previously refused to perform Russian music or to cooperate with Russian artists who support the war have since renewed their ties. And Ukrainian culture has so much to offer. Our composers have produced masterpieces, and our writers should be no less esteemed than their Russian counterparts. Ukrainian literature has deep roots and is still actively developing. Our fine and decorative arts share their origins with Europe's rich cultural history.

▲ *The Donetsk Academic Regional Drama Theatre in Mariupol, after it was bombed in March 2022. Photograph: Alexei Alexandrov/AP*

Representatives of Ukrainian culture today consider it their mission to overcome the violence and destruction caused by Russia. Rejecting representatives of Russian culture who support its totalitarian regime and preventing concerts of Russian performers who openly support its war of aggression are conscious steps for a mature democratic society to take. Along with political and economic sanctions, they will be necessary if we are to defeat Russia's totalitarian project.

Oleksandr Tkachenko is Ukraine's minister of culture

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our letters section, please click here.

The 50 best albums of 2022 – 50 to 31

Safi Bugel, Shaad D'Souza and Laura Snapes

▲ From left … Pusha T, Björk and Bad Bunny. Illustration: Guardian Design/Getty Images for Roc Nation/ Vidar Logi/ Shutterstock

50

Phoenix – Alpha Zulu

People are fond of criticising Phoenix frontman Thomas Mars for writing cryptic or nonsensical lyrics. I say: listen a little deeper, won't you? Alpha Zulu, Phoenix's seventh album, interrogates middle-aged ennui with razor-sharp wit, imbuing intoxicatingly sensory synthpop songs with deeply sad lyrics about the tensions between work and love. It ends with Identical, a tribute to the band's late longtime producer Philippe Zdar, which also happens to be one of the band's all-timer anthems – a eulogy to close out the biggest festival stage in the world. *SD*

49

Tove Lo – Dirt Femme

The Swedish pop star's fifth – and first independent – album works as a decent primer for anyone who hasn't been paying attention to the past few years in pop. It's got Dua-style disco (thanks in part to sharing a collaborator in SG Lewis), Charli XCX's death drive and one of those now-ubiquitous, infuriatingly catchy Y2K pop interpolations in 2 Die 4, which, quite bafflingly, samples Crazy Frog's 2005 cover of Gershon Kingsley's 1969 song Popcorn. Consequently Tove Lo is less of an eye-popping presence here than on her previous records, though her apparent recalcitrance makes her unusual anxiety and conflict around relationships and intensity all the more striking. *LS*

48

Kojey Radical – Reasons to Smile

Kojey Radical's debut album finally arrived this year and, while a lot of long-gestating debuts can fall flat on arrival, Reasons to Smile was worth the wait. Its interplay of hip-hop grit and neo-soul smoothness is kinetic and hypnotic, like watching oil and vinegar try to emulsify. Radical himself is the glue between Reasons to Smile's warring sides, a grinning, gloriously charismatic guide through his universe. *SD*

47

Earl Sweatshirt – Sick!

During a season of loss and introversion, an artist who made his name considering those states of being surprised listeners by expanding his purview, reaching outwards to forge connection – it's there too in the warmth of the vintage soul-tinged production – and define some sense of freedom on his terms. It's a beautiful example of Earl's proclivity to defy expectations: on Sick!, the new father watches older members of his family die and reassesses his place in their lineage, past and future; he grapples with pain, how to process it rather than let it "fester into hate", and works to stay present, aware of how "life can change in the blink of an eye". *LS*

46

Danger Mouse and Black Thought – Cheat Codes

Danger Mouse, the defining producer of the 2000s, and Roots MC Black Thought have been working together for years, but their long-mooted full-length collab didn't properly materialise until this summer. The result is soulful and whip-smart, and makes good on the promise of their first outing together, the 2005 Dangerdoom track Mad Nice: Cheat Codes contains granite-solid bars, luxuriant and sample-heavy beats in one of the most perfect producer/MC pairings of the past 20 years. *SD*

45

Special Interest – Endure

After six years on the DIY circuit, 2022 saw the New Orleans punk outfit head towards the mainstream. Compared with their back catalogue of distorted guitars and industrial synthesis, Endure was notably more pop-aligned, with buoyant keys and groovy riffs wrestling against lead singer Alli Logout's grizzled vocals and a chugging drum machine. It was a change that felt like a liberating step forward, learning to embrace the more playful side of punk, rather than a sellout move. *SB*

44

Julia Jacklin – Pre Pleasure

Julia Jacklin's first two records are rooted in relentless, cathartic self-interrogation. But Pre Pleasure is about picking yourself up, stepping over the strange entrails of truth you unearthed, and trying to remember who you are without the baggage and bad vibes. Pre Pleasure is all pristine, gently loping arrangements and reminders to stay healthy, stay happy, have some fun. It's not a *live, laugh, love* album as much as a reminder to let yourself off the hook every once in a while. As Jacklin whispers on Ignore Tenderness, with more than a tiny wink: "Go on, let it all out." *SD*

43

Suede – Autofiction

On Suede's ninth album, Brett Anderson is in a reflective mood, contemplating the loss of his mother and his roles as a father, lover and performer, and how the latter cross paths with the younger versions of himself that populate his memories. It's a nostalgic nook that many rock stars of his vintage find themselves in once they hit middle age – but unlike many rock stars of his vintage, Anderson bucks the expectation to frame these ruminations as a swan song. Instead he tackles them with all the guts, rage and euphoria of a young man with those evolutions and incarnations still ahead of him. *LS*

42

Alex G – God Save the Animals

When asked by Pitchfork why his ninth album was so awash in religious imagery, Alex Giannascoli replied: "A few people that I'm close to became religious. It made me wonder what they found." God Save the Animals suggests that what they found may have been, plainly, ease – a contentment and faith in the world that's been hard to find on Giannascoli's past few albums. Although he may be as neurotic and searching as ever, God Save the Animals finds him zeroing in on tiny moments of relief from the anxieties of the world, trudging up a never-ending hill and telling himself a mantra steeped in earnestness and irony: "Every day is a blessing." *SD*

41

Oliver Sim – Hideous Bastard

The greatest trick pulled by the xx is in how joint singers Romy Madley Croft and Oliver Sim dissolve their personal perspectives into an alluring, all-embracing whole. But on Sim's debut album, he considers the many ways he has tried to disappear in his life – denial, fear, isolation, shame – and weighs up their cost. The antidote, Hideous Bastard suggests, is in unvarnished, often unflattering honesty; the slinky, seductive, often twisted music, produced by Sim's bandmate Jamie xx, creates the perfect uncanny spotlight for it. *LS*

40

Alabaster DePlume – Gold – Go Forward in the Courage of Your Love

One of the year's most confronting albums didn't deal in noise or aggression, but deeply insistent compassion. "Don't forget you're precious," the Manchester jazz poet insists across Gold, one of the album's many such mantras. These are hard messages for anyone inclined to self-criticism to hear – and DePlume (AKA Gus Fairbairn) counts himself among them, laying bare his struggle to remember his own worth. In doing so he dodges the sentimentality that might otherwise overwhelm a record that proceeds with both palms held upright to the sky. And the sincerity of his mission is evident in its real-world application, with the eerie rhythms, heart-caressing vocal harmonies and vulnerable horns imperceptibly stitched together from days of improvisation with various different ensembles. If we can't remember that we're precious, he seems to suggest, being in community with others might remind us. *LS*

39

The Weather Station – How Is It That I Should Look at the Stars

Tamara Lindeman couldn't have had any idea what was to come when she sat down at the piano from 10-12 March 2020 to record How Is It That I Should Look at the Stars. On the companion album to last year's Ignorance, she weighs up what kind of uncertainty we can tolerate living with – and what the point of certainty is in a world in flux. Her conclusions, at least when it comes to politics and the environment, are less than reassuring. But she threads her anxieties with a resonant confidence that love, as unpredictable as it is, remains a risk worth investing in, the Joni-like spirit in her vocals undimmed. *LS*

38

Bad Bunny – Un Verano Sin Ti

The year's most streamed album is an old-fashioned romantic epic. Un Verano Sin Ti's achingly wistful tale of hedonism and heartbreak has a booze-soaked, tearstained mood; it feels tangentially indebted to classic literature (I hear the Bad Bunny of Un Verano Sin Ti, constantly jerking between the heat of partying and ice-cold alienation, as a perverse analogue to Neddy Merrill, from Cheever's The Swimmer) as well as cinematic worldbuilding breakup albums such as Lorde's Melodrama. Bad Bunny pairs his heartbroken missives with sublime reggaeton, dembow and bachata, as well as surprising moments of softness courtesy of indie artists such as the Marías, Buscabulla and Bomba Estéreo. He flits effortlessly between raucous party-starting and moments of wounded introversion, distilling all the divine drama of summer into 81 intoxicating, all-too-short minutes. *SD*

37

Wu-Lu – Loggerhead

Loggerhead is a little like a zombie movie where Wu-Lu is the lone survivor, a muffled voice of humanity trying to make out any remnants of life in an environment that no longer feels familiar. He stalks the album's diffuse post-punk landscapes, alternately yelling and mumbling, singing and rapping, letting out a harsh, piercing scream during South, the record's centrepiece. The closest comparison for this remarkable, haunted debut album would perhaps be enigmatic London experimentalist Dean Blunt, but where Blunt's main mode is detachment, Wu-Lu seeks out the visceral and the guttural, making an indelible impression in the process. *SD*

36

Sharon Van Etten – We've Been Going About This All Wrong

At the dawn of the 2020s, Sharon Van Etten, like so many others, began to feel the natural world revolt. Her sixth album is her response – not a raging polemic, but an attempt to answer the question she asks on Darkish: "Where will we be when our world is done?" Over a thunder of synths and guitars, she writes love songs to her child and partner, attempts to make peace with her anxieties about motherhood, sex and self-image. As the album crescendos with the magnificent Mistakes, she unleashes a torrent of intermingled pain and joy: "Even when I make a mistake / It's much better than that!" *SD*

35

Björk – Fossora

If Björk's last album, 2017's Utopia, was about an idealised version of life, she told us in August, then Fossora represented the real world: "Let's see what it's like when you walk into this fantasy and, you know, have a lunch and *farrrrt* and do normal things, like meet your friends." Naturally, Björk's musical rendering of domestic life didn't hold much truck with verité depictions of daily life. Instead, she twisted an artillery of bass clarinets, gabber beats and that famously abundant vocal range into a typically idiosyncratic vision of community inspired by mushrooms and matrilineage. *LS*

34

▲ Striking … Tove Lo. Photograph: Moni Haworth

Charlotte Adigéry and Bolis Pupul – Topical Dancer

In a world of rigid thinking and hard borders between countries and sounds, the Belgium-based duo make their lunge towards freedom. "Thank yourself / Praise your body / Celebrate and dance," they urge. Liberation can be found in the body, they suggest – in reclaimed sexuality, a clear mind and a deep belly laugh – and they supply the tools to help get us there: the funk, the slink and a reminder of the pleasures of not taking life too seriously. *LS*

33

Oren Ambarchi / Johan Berthling / Andreas Werliin – Ghosted

In another typically prolific year for Oren Ambarchi, the Australian guitarist picked up the baton with some of his most enduring collaborators, the Swedes double bassist Johan Berthling and drummer Andreas Werliin. Ghosted is a hypnotic exploration of groove that seems to strip back over the course of its four already impressively lean songs: I is busy and curious; II shudders and flickers over a single repeated fretboard harmonic refrain. The eerie, pattering III starts leading the trio into the shadows before IV slips into the realm of hushed doom jazz plied by Bohren und der Club of Gore. As good an entry point as any into a rich catalogue (try Ambarchi's glorious 2022 solo album Shebang, for one). *LS*

32

Yaya Bey – Remember Your North Star

Yaya Bey's superlative second record is one of the year's coolest, a heady mix of R&B and jazz that's lived-in, conversational, meticulous; acidic in its humour and boundless in its empathy. Songs such as Keisha and Meet Me in Brooklyn are filled with subtle interlocking parts but never feel busy: the production equivalent of no-makeup makeup, they provide perfectly minimal backing for Bey to unspool her lackadaisical but painstakingly composed lyrics about relationships, work and Black womanhood. Recalling incisive, free-spirited chroniclers of sex and romance such as SZA and Cookie Mueller, Bey provides a much-needed voice for 21st-century singles everywhere, getting lost in love and looking good doing it. *SD*

31

Pusha T – It's Almost Dry

Four years after his career-rejuvenating instant classic Daytona, Pusha T returned with It's Almost Dry, arguably his sharpest and most appealingly persnickety album since his peak Clipse days. Unlike on Daytona, there's no Drake beef here to draw Push's ire; instead, his lyrics are all about petty rifts and decades-old dramas, scores that can only be settled with excoriating, ice-cold wordplay. While the credits list seems bloated – It's Almost Dry is stacked with household names including Kanye West, Jay-Z, Pharrell, Kid

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Cudi and Lil Uzi Vert, and features a Beyoncé sample on grandiose highlight Rock n Roll – the focus is squarely on Pusha, as, nearly 20 years on from his first commercial peak, he re-establishes himself as one of the era's most vital rappers. *SD*

Creepy behavior or pop performance? 1975's Matty Healy reignites debate about onstage kissing

Alaina Demopoulos

The 1975's tour has been a spectacle of manufactured chaos, most of it courtesy of the band's frontman, Matty Healy. The sets have delivered a feast of made-for-TikTok moments. The singer has subjected fans to everything from onstage push-ups to yelling at security through an auto-tuned microphone. He's even risked a tapeworm by eating raw meat on stage. But the biggest buzz comes from his seemingly most-beloved trick: kissing fans. (One hopes he does this *before*consuming the ribeye.)

▲ *Matty Healy of the 1975 performs in Leeds in August. Photograph: Matthew Baker/Getty Images*

As clips posted on Twitter and TikTok show, Healy has invited men and women to smooch. In avoidance of rock music's dismal history of consent, he has made a point of asking fans if they'd like to "snog" before going in for the kiss, with Isabella, a 24-year-old bartender from Dallas, tweeting "he ASKED before he kissed me" and adding in an interview that Healy said "we don't have to snog if you don't want to" to her before she fully consented to the kiss. Austin, from San Diego, wrote on Twitter that his make-out was "an insane experience" that "made [him] feel something [he] couldn't fully put into words".

Kissing fans on stage isn't exactly new territory for pop stars. Elvis Presley's 70s performances found the crooner kissing just about every woman in the room when he performed Love Me Tender. Diamond Dogs-era David Bowie made it a part of his shtick. Bono has been cozying up to fans at arena tours for years. It's not even the first time for Healy: fans said he did the same during a 2014 tour, and again at a 2019 Dubai show to protest against the country's anti-LGBTQ+ stance.

"Pulling a fan out of the audience to kiss them enacts a kind of fantasy, and it's a pretty time-worn trope," said Jack Hamilton, an associate professor of cultural studies at the University of Virginia and author of Just Around Midnight: Rock and Roll and the Racial Imagination. "If you think about the crooner tradition or the singing of love songs, it's nothing new for people to have crushes on stars. Kissing someone on stage is the literal fulfillment of that fantasy."

But the fulfillment of fantasy relies on consent. In 2019, footage from 2010 surfaced showing Drake kissing and groping a 17-year-old girl (when the rapper learned her age, he sent her back, and admonished her: "Why do you look like that?").

This year, Enrique Iglesias posted a video showing him kissing and fondling a woman at a meet-and-greet; some fans bashed the singer for his behavior, noting that he's been in a partnership with the tennis player Anna Kournikovasince 2001.

Healy's make-outs occur in full view of fans, who post their footage to social media. "It seems like a relatively safe space that's documented, part of the performance and part of the act," said Theo Cateforis, an associate professor of music history at Syracuse University. "The creepy behavior [from musicians] tends to be private and out of the public's view."

Eva Walker, who plays in the band the Black Tones and DJs for the alternative Seattle radio station KEXP, says her two rules for onstage antics are: "Don't hurt anyone, and ask first." She remembers a show she played in her early 20s, when a woman came up after her and asked for a kiss. When she obliged, the woman's girlfriend ran over, angry. "I thought, 'Oh, no,' and then I asked, 'Would you like a kiss too?' And her mood changed, she was so happy and said 'Oh yeah.' So I kissed the girlfriend and everyone lived happily ever after."

Healy's behavior is nothing new to these artists. "As long as there's consent, it can be entertaining," Walker said. "It seems like if there is an ethical rockstar way to be sleazy on stage, [Healy] found it. Both parties seemed happy. I hope the days are over of the damsel in distress, bend her down and kiss her thing, because that's how you get punched in the face."

JNA, a Seattle-based disco artist, says the audience doesn't need to know whether the person she kisses on stage. "It's one of those rock'n'roll tricks that's a tale as old as time," she says. When she performs, she often asks her husband to stand near the stage. "I tell him, 'I need you to be right here, because I'm not going to touch anybody else, but I'll be sexy with you and no one in the crowd knows you're my husband. But when I was younger, I was definitely front and center, ready for someone to pull me onstage. That's why we go to shows when we're young."

▲ *Bruce Springsteen kisses a fan onstage in 1985. Photograph: Richard E Aaron/Redferns*

No matter how ideas about consent and boundaries have evolved, the prototypical pop star still holds a particular place in the collective imagination. "There is still a pretty resilient set of assumptions about how pop stars have license to behave in ways that the rest of us don't," said Steve Waksman, associate professor of music and American studies at Smith College. "They are allowed to act out things that we aren't allowed to do ourselves."

In a way, Healy's kisses can seem less like a spontaneous transgression and more of a carefully planned piece of choreography – especially when the same script is repeated night after night.

"Kissing a single fan in the context of an arena show allows for a moment of intimacy that everyone can share," Waksman said. "It's a way to break the fourth wall, and even if it's cheesy, pop is a realm of these types of grand gestures."

The 50 best movies of 2022 in the US – 50 to 31

This list is compiled by the Guardian film team, with all films released in the US during 2022 in contention. Check in every weekday to see our next picks, and please share your own favourite films of 2022 in the comments below.

▲ *From left … Tilda Swinton in The Eternal Daughter, Achouackh Abakar Souleymane in Lingui, the Sacred Bonds and Vicky Krieps in Corsage. Illustration: Guardian Design/A24/MK2 Films*

50

Bros

Billy Eichner's ribald romcom, produced by Judd Apatow, saw two gay men struggling with commitment and heteronormative expectations and was heralded as being a groundbreaking queer first within the straight and strait-laced studio system. But, stake-claiming aside, it is also genuinely funny and insightful. Read the full review

49

Broker

Hirokazu Kore-eda enlisted Parasite's Song Kang-ho for a rich and emotionally persuasive drama about two friends stealing babies from outside a church and selling them on the adoption parallel market. Read the full review

48

Top Gun: Maverick

Tom Cruise returns almost four decades on for another bout of speed and need: this time he is the mentor to a new generation of navy fighter pilots, led by Miles Teller, playing the son of Maverick's late wingman, Goose. Read the full review

47

Paris, 13th District

The latest film from Rust and Bone director Jacques Audiard, here putting together a short story collection of sexual encounters and relationships in Paris' 13th arrondissement, shot in tough black-and-white. Read the full review

46

Holy Spider

Border director Ali Abbasi returned to the Cannes film festival this year with a shocking act of provocation. A grisly thriller loosely based on the true story of a serial killer targeting women in Mashhad, it caused controversy in Iran but won Zar Amir Ebrahimi the lead actress prize at the festival. Read the full review

45

Happening

Golden Lion-winning abortion drama, more relevant than ever, from director Audrey Diwan; a study of a woman (played by Anamaria Vartolomei) who becomes pregnant in early 60s, pre-legalisation France. Read the full review

44

Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery

Entertaining second dose of Rian Johnson's labyrinthine crime mystery, with Daniel Craig on good form as Hercule Poirot-esque detective Benoit Blanc, here investigating a murder-themed party that turns deadly. Read the full review

▲ *Rich and emotionally persuasive … Broker. Photograph: Zip/CJ ENM*

43

Vortex

Split-screen dementia drama from Argentine provocateur Gaspar Noé, starring Dario Argento and Françoise Lebrun as an elderly couple whose lives are dogged by the latter's cognitive decline. Read the full review

42

The Woman King

Stirring period epic, starring Viola Davis as the leader of the Agojie, a brigade of female warriors in west Africa, who are attempting to see off threats from the Oyo empire as well as from

Continued on page 33

Continued *from page 32*

slave-buying colonialists. Read the full review

41

Brian and Charles

David Earl and Chris Hayward's story of an inventor's relationship with his creation blends Caractacus Potts with Victor Frankenstein to heart-warming effect. Read the full review

40

We (Nous)

French-Senegalese film-maker Alice Diop offers a sensitive portrayal of the disparate communities that live along one of Paris's commuter rail lines – predating her acclaimed fiction feature debut Saint Omer. Read the full review

39

The Eternal Daughter

Joanna Hogg reunites with Tilda Swinton for an unusual ghost story which sees the actor playing dual roles in a moving and thought-provoking drama that exists within the same universe as her acclaimed autobiographical Souvenir films. Read the full review

38

Everything Went Fine

André Dussollier and Sophie Marceau are outstanding as a father and daughter whose tricky relationship is upended when he asks for her help to die, in François Ozon's wonderfully observed story. Read the full review

37

Benediction

Terence Davies' account of the life of Siegfried Sassoon (played by Jack Lowden and Peter Capaldi in younger/older versions), tracing his career from lionised war poet to unhappy later life. Read the full review

36

Small Body

Mysterious fable from Italian director Laura Samani, about a woman desperate to revive her stillborn baby who heads off on a quest to find the church that may be able to accomplish it. Read the full review

35

Great Freedom

Intriguing German drama about a former concentration camp inmate imprisoned after the second world war for gay sex acts, and who develops a complex relationship with his straight cellmate. Read the full review

34

All Quiet on the Western Front

Anti-war nightmare of bloodshed and chaos where teenage boys quickly find themselves caught up in the ordeal of trench warfare, in a German-language adaptation of the first world war novel. Read the full review

33

Lingui, the Sacred Bonds

Chadian auteur Mahamat-Saleh Haroun's quiet fable, about a woman torn between social proprieties and respecting her daughter's decision to get an abortion. Read the full review

32

All That Breathes

Two Indian brothers dedicate themselves to rescuing birds that are being poisoned by pollution in this complex and quietly beautiful film. Read the full review

31

Corsage

Vicky Krieps puts in a star turn as lonely, patronised Elisabeth of Austria in Marie Kreutzer's austere drama that functions as a cry of anger from the pedestal-prison of an empress. Read the full review

'Join the club': Stephen King, Margaret Atwood and more reassure debut author after lonely book launch

Sian Cain

When debut author Chelsea Banning vented on Twitter about no one showing up at her book signing, she didn't expect that some of the world's most famous authors, including Stephen King, Margaret Atwood and Neil Gaiman, would respond with tales of their own nightmare public appearances.

"At my first Salem's Lot signing, I had one customer. A fat kid who said, 'Hey bud, do you know where there's some Nazi books?'" King wrote to her.

"Terry Pratchett and I did a signing in Manhattan for Good Omens that nobody came to at all. So you are two up on us," Gaiman wrote.

"Join the club," Atwood wrote. "I did a signing to which nobody came, except a guy who wanted to buy some Scotch tape and thought I was the help."

▲ *(l-R) Neil Gaiman, Margaret Atwood and Stephen King have revealed their tales of lonely book signings early in their careers. Composite: REX/Shutterstock / Invision/AP / Getty Images*

Banning had arrived at Pretty Good Books in Ashtabula, Ohio, on the weekend for the event to launch her debut novel, Of Crowns and Legends. She was hoping that most of the 37 people who had RSVPed would show – but only two people turned up. They were both her friends.

"Kind of upset, honestly," she tweeted afterwards, "and a little embarrassed."

Speaking to the Guardian a few days later, Banning said: "I was pretty bummed, honestly. I was happy to see the two that did, as they are my friends, and we had a good time chatting for a bit, but it was disheartening after a while and realising no one else was coming."

But within hours of posting her tweet, bestselling authors were lining up to share similar stories.

"I have sat lonely at a signing table many times only to have someone approach … and ask me where the bathroom is," Jodi Picoult wrote.

"Once sat out front of mall bookshop for a signing," bestselling crime author Linwood Barclay wrote. "No one stopped, until the very end, when an old guy paused, looked at me, looked at the books, looked at me, approached and asked, 'Do they sell flags here?'"

"I did a book reading where only my husband's cousin showed up. One person. I'll never forget that reading," Pachinko author Min Jin Lee wrote.

"Ooh, boy, too many to share. The one where the bookshop staff kindly pretended to be customers so I wouldn't feel too bad, that stays with me," One Day author David Nicholls wrote. "I should also add – don't be downhearted, it's a kind of rite of passage that happens to everyone, and congratulations on the book!"

"I was once invited to a crime writers' festival. Colin Dexter was on at the same time. Only one person showed up for me. We chatted for a while and I told him how glad I was that he'd come," wrote Jonathan Coe. "He said, 'Actually I'm Ian Rankin and I was supposed to be introducing you.'"

The thread began to spread even wider than names in literature. "That is the beginning," actor Henry Winkler wrote. "Then word gets out and they come!"

"YO," rapper Flavor Flav wrote to her. "Here to hype up ya next signing!"

The warm response moved Banning to tears and completely changed how she feels about the lonely signing. "I feel elated!" she said. "And excited and definitely reassured. I'm not even upset about no one coming – I heard back from a lot of them, and they or their families ended up getting sick."

She has since had almost 500 orders placed for digital copies of her book, and it has shot up Amazon's charts.

Does she have any more signings planned? "Not at the moment," she said. "But I am working on a few!"

'Silly, soggy' or 'screamingly good'? First responses to Avatar: The Way of Water emerge

Guardian film

The first responses to Avatar: The Way of Water have emerged online after the film's world premiere in London on Tuesday. Full reviews of James Cameron's long-in-the-making sequel to his own record-box-office fantasy epic won't be published until next Tuesday, as per the distributor's embargo, but critics are posting short responses on social media.

In the US, reactions have been largely positive. David Ehrlich, chief critic of Indiewire, said it was "light years better than the first & easily one of the best theatrical experiences in ages. streaming found dead in a ditch". He added: "I was, uh, not exactly champing at the bit for an Avatar 2 … now I can't *wait* to see Avatar 3. that's basically all I wanted out of this and it delivered in a big way."

The Atlantic's David Sims said: "Avatar: The Way of Water absolutely owns bones," adding: "It's an Avatar movie: slow start, big build, incredibly involving second act with a ton of world building and cool creatures that blisses you way out, then an hour of screamingly good crystal clear emotionally trenchant action to send you home full and happy."

People magazine's Kara Warner, a self-confessed "Avatar stan" wrote: "I had high hopes … and for me it totally delivers. Sure it's a little long, but worth it for the gorgeous visuals, wonderful

Continued *on page 34*

Continued from page 33

new characters. A total thrill."

The positivity was backed up by Cameron's fellow film-maker Guillermo del Toro, who wrote on social media: "I say it again: Avatar 2 – seeing it you realize how long it has been since you saw a MOVIE-MOVIE (like that, in caps)."

However, reaction in the UK has been less uncritical. The Guardian's chief film critic Peter Bradshaw has led the charge, saying "Avatar: The Way Of Water is a silly, soggy, motion-smoothed epic of solemnity without a single interesting visual image", while the Daily Telegraph's Robbie Collin posted a cryptic "grimace" emoji.

▲ Dampening expectations ... Avatar: The Way of Water. Photograph: 20th Century

Christina Newland, lead critic of the i newspaper, was also less than impressed, writing: "Avatar: The Way of Water is a film to be admired more than loved – some remarkable spectacle, some throwback to Titanic set pieces, some really lovely visual flourishes. But it's also interminably, ploddingly overlong, and more impressive than truly absorbing."

Empire magazine's Amon Warmann was a little more generous, but still equivocal, writing: "Liked it, didn't love it. The good news is that 3D is good again (yay!), and the action is pretty incredible (especially in the final act). But many of the storylines feel like they have to stop and start, and the high frame rate was hit & miss for me." He added: "This movie sure is pretty to look at though. And on the whole, I like #TheWayOfWater more than #Avatar 2009, if for nothing else because it has less in your face white saviourism than the original."

Avatar: The Way of Water is released on 15 December in Australia and 16 December in the US and UK.

Christmas Bloody Christmas review – Robo-Claus rampage in seasonal slasher

Leslie Felperin

'Tis the season for genre film-makers and distributors to cash in with horror-themed Christmas movies. So if current hit Violent Night sounds a little too classy and mainstream, then here is this shoddily made but tinsel-bright gift for you, the cinematic equivalent of a cheap soap and body lotion set bought at the last minute. It's serviceable, but not a lot of thought went into it.

Adding to the corpus of films about Santas who are not just bad but positively evil (see also Krampus, Rare Exports et al), Christmas Bloody Christmas builds its plot around an animatronic toy-shop Santa Claus robot that suddenly develops a murderous instinct. Before the mayhem commences, however, the film spends time with record-store owner Tori (Riley Dandy) and her employee-friend Robbie (Sam Delich), two likable cool kids with opinions on all sorts of bands, movies and leisure activities that they ceaselessly bicker over. In fact, their fluent, lively dialogue and simmering flirtation feels surprisingly spontaneous and authentic, to the point where one rather dreads that the mayhem will soon start and all conversation will turn to various kinds of screaming. As Tori and Robbie visit some friends in a neighbouring shop and then make their way to a dive bar, the Robo-Claus comes to life and starts killing all and sundry.

▲ Unholy night ... Riley Dandy in Christmas Bloody Christmas.

It's never clearly explained why this electronic Father Christmas is so intent on killing Tori and Robbie when surely there are plenty of other people to attack, but you get the sense writer-director Joe Begos wasn't so interested in motivation and logic. Sadly, that makes the film less engaging, but it must be acknowledged that Dandy is outstanding in the role of the lead/last girl, showing off real comic chops in the early running and then screaming with terror like a champ in the later stages. She might go far if she can break out of doing Christmas movies. Also fun is the lurid lighting design, which looks as if the whole set was illuminated only by various hues of fairy lights.

● Christmas Bloody Christmas is available on 9 December on Shudder.

The Bishop's Wife review – Cary Grant and David Niven shine in cosy Christmas comedy

Peter Bradshaw

There's an unworldly charm and odd, innocent solemnity to this Christmas fantasy comedy from 1947, now on rerelease, directed by Henry Koster and starring Cary Grant, David Niven and Loretta Young. Niven plays the sobersided Bishop Henry Brougham, a decent but now careworn man whose overwork has lately caused him to neglect the happiness of his sweet-natured wife Julia (Young) and infant daughter Debby (Karolyn Grimes). As the Christmas season approaches, the bishop is becoming a veritable Scrooge, a role he effectively shares with the wealthy widow Mrs Hamilton (Gladys Cooper). She was instrumental in getting him the bishop's job in the first place, and is now exhaustingly stringing him along with a promise to fund the building of a vainglorious new cathedral with which the bishop has become wholly obsessed – but only if it includes a vulgar monument to her late husband.

Julia never gets to see her husband or their old friends, like the genial, peppery old professor (Monty Woolley) who is working on his magnum opus about ancient Rome. Poor Henry, aware that things are amiss, prays for guidance, and out of the blue, a beautifully tailored angel descends: Dudley, played with an opaque and unreadable suavity by Grant. Dudley is going to give Henry what he needs, not what he wants.

▲ Wayward ... Cary Grant, David Niven and Loretta Young in The Bishop's Wife. Photograph: Allstar Picture Library/Alamy

Of course, Dudley has a shrewd, intimate knowledge of all these people, a little like Clarence in It's a Wonderful Life (or the inspector in Priestley's An Inspector Calls). But for me, this does not have the comic exuberance or passion of James Stewart's Christmas classic – and I think it is basically because it is about a man of the cloth. For all its attractions, the film is sometimes a bit inhibited and sententious; perhaps Hollywood just didn't want to be in any way irreverent about a clergyman. The coolly restrained bishop and the enigmatic angel Dudley are in fact not all that dissimilar. It would have been interesting to see the casting reversed.

Having said which, the question of Dudley falling in love with Julia is rather striking, especially as the film declines to acknowledge, almost until the very end, that there is indeed something scandalous in the bishop's wife becoming so familiar with a handsome stranger. Dudley suggests that he is thinking of abandoning his angelic vocation in the cause of human love (a theme later taken up by Wim Wenders in Wings of Desire), which will mean breaking up a marriage. His character becomes potentially sadder, even tragic. But Grant does not emote any more than usual.

Well, there is a lot that's beguiling in this fey and wayward piece with its very theatrical drawing room scenes. The skating sequence is a little gem. It's classic yuletide comfort food.

● The Bishop's Wife is released on 9 December in cinemas.

Democratic senators warn UN secretary general of eroding public trust in Cop

Nina Lakhani in New York

Senior Democratic senators have written to the head of the United Nations warning that public trust in global negotiations on climate action is at risk because of the scale of corporate lobbying – and new controls are needed.

Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island, Ben Cardin of Maryland and Ed Markey of Massachusetts have sent a letter to António Gutierres, the UN secretary general, urging the UN to require sponsors and participants at future climate conferences to provide "audited corporate climate political influencing statements".

The highly unusual step comes a month after it was revealed that more than 630 fossil fuel lobbyists attended the 27th annual climate summit, Cop27, in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Scores more delegates linked to the food industry, mining and the plastics sector – as well as financial institutions that prop up these polluting industries – also participated, despite years of warnings from campaigners about the growing influence of bad faith actors.

"In addition to the issue of hosting a Cop in a country where human and environmental rights defenders are routinely imprisoned, it did not escape our attention that more than 600 fossil fuel lobbyists attended this Cop. We urge you to take steps to ensure that the Cop itself can avoid direct interference from corporate actors with a vested financial interest in undermining climate action," wrote the senators.

▲ *Senators Sheldon Whitehouse, Ben Cardin and Ed Markey penned a letter to UN secretary general, António Gutierres. Photograph: Mohamed Abd El Ghany/Reuters*

"We would recommend that in order to be allowed to be a sponsor, have a pavilion, be a presenter, or attend a Cop, a company be required to disclose an audited corporate climate political influencing statement. Such a requirement would bring much-needed transparency to corporate climate-related political influencing activities around the world, and would help restore public faith that the Cop process is not being abused by companies as an opportunity to greenwash," they added.

The annual two-week climate summit is attended by almost 200 countries and tens of thousands of delegates, and is the most important global arena for securing international cooperation on lowering emissions and fighting the climate crisis.

But despite three decades of talks, meaningful action has been slow. Greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise and the planet is heating with devastating consequences including worsening drought, floods, and heatwaves, as well as rising sea levels and melting glaciers – hitting communities and countries which have contributed least to the climate crisis the hardest.

Environmental and human rights NGOs have been pushing the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which operates the Cop summits, to address the conflicts of interest among sponsors and participants, but which has been met with resistance from business groups.

Rachel Rose Jackson, a spokesperson for the Kick Big Polluters Out campaign, which represents more than 450 groups, welcomed the senators' intervention.

"For years, governments collectively representing 70% of the world's population have joined hundreds of civil society organizations in trying to pass measures to protect climate policy from the abuse of big polluters. Consistently, the US government has been the largest blocker, and so it's refreshing to see a demand coming from within the United States … after yet another Cop overrun by polluters, we hope the UNFCCC will finally and firmly end the corporate stranglehold of climate policy," said Jackson.

Coca-Cola,a major Cop27 sponsor, has been found to be the world's top plastic polluter for five years running, as have PepsiCo and Nestlé which also both sent delegates to Egypt.

'We need the jobs': Cumbrians divided over new coalmine

Mark Brown North of England correspondent

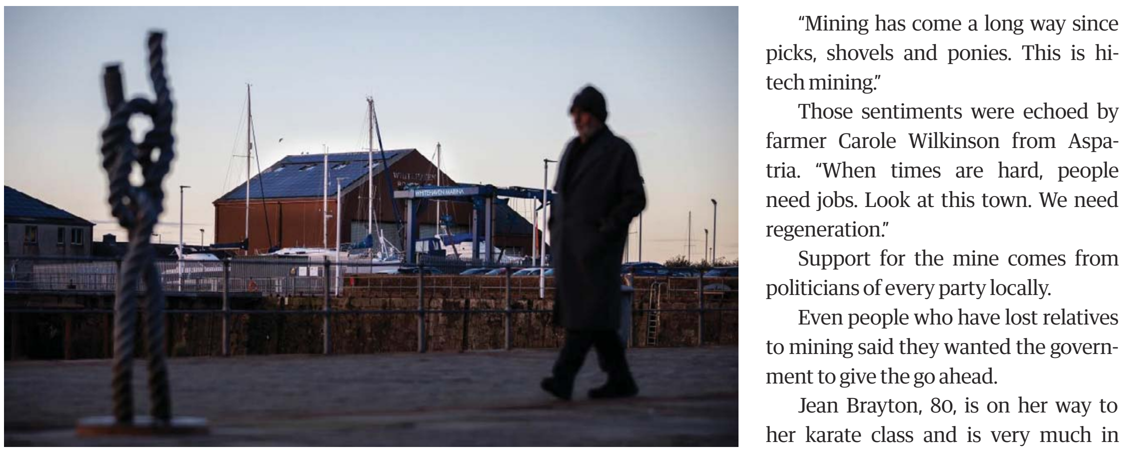
"If it brings jobs, then I'm all in favour of it," said retired chemical worker Keith Walker as he wandered with his dog Eddie on the site of what could be something many thought would never be seen in the UK again: a coalmine.

Walker worked at the Marchon chemical works on the outskirts of Whitehaven, the proposed site of the mine, for 27 years.

"That was the drift mine down there," he said, pointing. "It was Marchon's own drift mine. They mined for phosphate rock, but there wasn't the amount they needed so they had to go to Casablanca for it."

Speaking to the Guardian hours before the government gave its go ahead, Walker said: "From all the literature I've seen it looks like its going to be quite contained and well set out. I don't think it's going to be a blight on the landscape."

Most people in the town are in favour of the mine. They have been waiting for the news of the go ahead for what seems a long time, people repeatedly said.



▲ *Solar panel on the roof of Whitehaven Boat Harbour. The government has announced plans for a new coalmine in the town. Photograph: Joel Goodman/The Guardian*

But there are dissenting voices. "It's not right," said Margaret Telford, a retired shop worker. "Every family round here has lost a lot of people to mining and apart from that, it's not good for the world, is it?

"I had three uncles and two cousins killed in the mines and that is nothing round here, a lot of people did. My dad made sure my two brothers never went down the mines.

"It isn't just my family, it's the fact we should be stopping mining altogether really, I know it's coming from other countries but someone has to make a stance."

Graham Roberts, a Conservative county and town councillor, was out buying a copy of Country Life on Thursday. He too was eagerly waiting for the news. "We need the jobs," he said.

"The hysteria is out of proportion. The amount of pollution this would create compared with India or China is negligible. And why should we import coke and coal when we've got it here on our doorstep? We're saving the country money.

"Mining has come a long way since picks, shovels and ponies. This is hi-tech mining."

Those sentiments were echoed by farmer Carole Wilkinson from Aspatria. "When times are hard, people need jobs. Look at this town. We need regeneration."

Support for the mine comes from politicians of every party locally.

Even people who have lost relatives to mining said they wanted the government to give the go ahead.

Jean Brayton, 80, is on her way to her karate class and is very much in favour of the mine. "My dad worked down the pit. I lost two uncles. It has always been a mining place. But we need to be self-sufficient.

"It's not going to be a coal mine like they were. It will be up to date. It will have to be, won't it?"

Scott Kiggins, 28, is walking his two babies Ronnie and Bobby and thinks about their future in Whitehaven. "If it is bringing jobs into our area then I'm all in favour it. My grandparents and uncles were miners, but it's everyone's family round here. It surrounds us.

"West Cumbria is dominated by Sellafield and we need other jobs."

▲ *'Mining has come a long way since picks, shovels and ponies,' said a Conservative town councillor. 'This is hi-tech mining.' Photograph: Joel Goodman/The Guardian*

David Cook, a retired Sellafield worker, said: "This is a coal-mining area so I want it come back. The thing is will it last? They'll probably open it, start mining and within two years they'll shut it down."

Peter Gale, a soon to be retired car salesman, said he had been in favour because of jobs but the more he heard, the more he read, he had changed his mind. "It is too late for me but it's the damage it might do to the environment and the climate.

"This thing though has just dragged on and on and on. Every time you think they have sorted it there's another delay. When it comes, will it happen?"

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Morning Mail: doctors warn of long Covid, green light for giant grid batteries, Bali bomber released

Martin Farrer

Morning everyone. Even as the spectre of Covid recedes for many Australians, a lot of people are living with serious and chronic after-effects of the virus. Australia's peak doctors' body is so concerned about the impact of long Covid on the population and the health system that it thinks governments should reconsider mask mandates to address the problem.

Energy ministers are gathering in Brisbane today to discuss long-term changes to the power grid, and David Warner proves the scars of cricket's ball-tampering scandal still run deep.

Australia

'Defend the truth' |Brittany Higgins has spoken for the first time since the planned retrial of Bruce Lehrmann was abandoned, tweeting last night that she would be willing to "defend the truth" as a witness in "any potential civil cases brought by Mr Lehrmann".

Covid 'weakness' |The Australian Medical Association has blasted "weak political leadership" for what it sees as the premature relaxation of anti-Covid measures, saying that the health system is "not prepared" to deal with long-term issues stemming from the pandemic.

Heatwave warning |Homes in remote communities that are so poorly insulated they rise to temperatures that can "cook bodies" will put people's lives at risk in the coming days as a dangerous heatwave pushes the mercury over 40C in northern Australia.

Battery pack |Australia's energy ministers are expected to sign off on a scheme to accelerate the take-up of giant batteries to support the decarbonisation of the grid when they gather in Brisbane today, but are unlikely to make a decision on any Albanese government proposal to impose price caps on coal and gas.

▲ Australia's peak medical body says the government has relaxed Covid measures such as mask mandates too early. Photograph: Will Murray/AAP

World

Bomber released |Umar Patek, one of the bomb makers in the 2002 Bali attacks that killed more than 200 people, including 88 Australians, has been released on parole. The prime minister, Anthony Albanese, described Patek as "abhorrent" when the release plan was announced in August.

Putsch plan |German police have arrested 25 people, including a 71-year-old aristocrat on suspicion of a terrorist plan to overthrow the state and renegotiate the country's post-second world war settlement.

Wong plea |The foreign affairs minister, Penny Wong, will use a speech in Washington today to urge China to embrace US plans to prevent growing tensions from spiralling into war, while rejecting claims that Australia's plan to acquire nuclear-powered submarines is driving a regional arms race.

China U-turn |China's government has said people with Covid-19 who have mild or no symptoms can quarantine at home, in a significant sign Beijing has abandoned its zero-Covid policy.

Full Story

The draconian laws that jailed climate activist Violet CocoGuardian Australia's environment editor, Adam Morton, explains how the decision to jail Violet Coco for 15 months for demonstrating on the Sydney Harbour Bridge will affect the future of climate protest.

In-depth

It's been a big week for the economy after the Reserve Bank of Australia raised rates for the eighth month in succession in the face of ever-rising inflation. Our resident economics expert, Greg Jericho, says indicators such as household disposable income show the economy is already slowing fast, so the central bank must be careful not to strangle growth.

Not the news

Brittney Rigby has got three weeks to go before her debut at hosting her family's Christmas gathering. She has been collecting advice on how to decorate the tree, set the table, what to cook and, most important, why you must not sweat the small stuff. Talking of decorations, check out our roundup of the worst-ever Christmas trees – from Port Macquarie's viral disaster to an office coat rack.

The world of sport

Cricket |A quad injury has ruled Pat Cummins out of the Adelaide Test starting today, with Steve Smith to captain against West Indies and Scott Boland to take Cummins' place in the bowling attack.

Warner wound |David Warner has reopened some of the wounds of the ball-tampering scandal on the eve of the second test in Adelaide by withdrawing his bid to have his lifetime captaincy ban lifted, and accusing the independent panel conducting the review of wanting to publicly lynch him.

Tennis |Novak Djokovic will begin his Australian Open assault at the Adelaide International on 1 January after he was confirmed in the draw.

Formula One |Six venues will host sprint races in the 2023 F1 season at meetings in Azerbaijan, Austria, Belgium, Qatar, the US and Brazil.

Media roundup

The Sydney Morning Herald reports that the Albanese government has asked the states to cap the price of coal at $125 a tonne, which is less than half the market rate, to fix the energy crisis. The Age says Victorian Liberal leadership contenders are "sweating" on the outcome of a secret ballot of party kingmakers. The Adelaide Advertiser leads with the plans to amalgamate the universities of Adelaide and South Australia to create the country's biggest university. The sister of a woman found dead in Fremantle harbour has pleaded with anyone who knows what happened to her to speak to police, the West Australian reports.

What's happening today

▲ Brittany Higgins leaves the ACT supreme court in Canberra. Photograph: Mick Tsikas/AAP

Press club |The home affairs minister, Clare O'Neil, speaks at the National Press Club.

Boomtown summit |The Boomtown property and infrastructure summit in Sydney will be attended by the NSW premier, Dominic Perrottet.

Plibersek plan |The environment minister, Tanya Plibersek, launches Labor's "nature positive plan" in Brisbane and later addresses the Queensland Conservation Council symposium.

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Brain teaser

And finally, here are the Guardian's crosswords to keep you entertained throughout the day – with plenty more on the Guardian's Puzzles app for iOS and Android. Until tomorrow.

Quick crossword

Cryptic crossword

Have no doubt: opening a coalmine in Cumbria is a climate crime against humanity

Caroline Lucas

Today, the government has thrown its weight behind a climate-busting, backward-looking coalmine in Cumbria. The staggering hypocrisy of demanding other countries phase down coal, just when we're phasing it back in again, sends a truly terrible message to global south countries and marks this decision as a climate crime against humanity.

Given this, you'd be forgiven for wondering why a new coalmine appears to have garnered local support. Areas such as Whitehaven in west Cumbria have been told it will "level up" the community – bringing lower bills, more jobs and economic revival to areas that have severely lacked all three for generations. So when a private coal company turned up, the community, understandably nostalgic for its more prosperous past, bit their arm off.

▲ The former Woodhouse colliery in Whitehaven, Cumbria is the site for West Cumbria Mining's plan to open a new coalmine. Photograph: Christopher Thomond/The Guardian

This mine threatens to pump out 9m tonnes of CO_2 emissions each year – equivalent to the cities of Edinburgh, Cardiff and Belfast combined. Tory backbenchers, senior figures and even the former Cop26 president, Alok Sharma, have all begged the government not to open this mine. But now, past climate pledges to reduce emissions and phase out coal have been conveniently forgotten, and current clamours have fallen on closed ears. Our oft-trumpeted claims of climate leadership bypassed; our credibility on the world stage in tatters.

It's equally false for ministers to claim now that, after the devastating war in Ukraine, we need to ensure that energy bills don't spiral further and rely on our own "domestic resources". Whitehaven will produce coking coal for the steel industry, not for power generation – it will make absolutely no difference to household energy bills, and will do nothing to improve domestic energy supply.

Yet even the steel industry itself neither wants nor needs this coal. British Steel (one of the UK's two major steel customers) has said it is unlikely to use the coal, owing to its high sulphur content. A steel expert states that the mine "would not displace a single tonne of Russian coking coal from the UK", since Russia also uses a different type of coking coal. As the Climate Change Committee notes, the site won't support the UK steel industry at all because 85% of the coal will be exported abroad.

Instead, the steel industry is looking to the future. "Green steel" uses electric arc furnaces (EAF) to produce steel from direct reduced iron (DRI). While early-stage green steel still uses some gas, the process can become zero or very low carbon through the use

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of hydrogen, produced by electrolysis using renewable energy. So those coal jobs promised? They won't last long when the mine becomes an enormous stranded asset.

It's clear that this mine will be nothing more than a toxic, expensive and useless dump by circa 2030. But until there is a convincing, transformative plan for a greener future, no one will consider alternative solutions.

For example, one local report last year found that over the next 15 years, 9,000 green jobs could be created in Cumbria – of which 4,500 would be specifically in west Cumbria, where this coal will be dug up. That's nine times the numbers of jobs expected from the mine. From generating renewable electricity, to retrofitting buildings – these are high-skilled, high-quality, long-term jobs for the future.

Then there's economic revival. The only way to replace fossil fuels in the long term is ambitious investment in renewable energy. There is a greener route to the local prosperity that areas such as west Cumbria are craving. And it's happening right now, in places including Lewes, where Greens jointly run the council – by pooling resources with neighbouring areas, they're insulating 40,000 social homes across the region, installing renewable energy, and keeping jobs required for those services within the local area.

While Whitehaven won't make any difference to fuel bills, the government could be doing things that will. When we have the leakiest homes in Europe, we need to insulate the nation with enough funding to make it work. The cheapest energy is the energy we don't use – so let's help people save rather than squander.

This is the kind of future that not only west Cumbrians could have – but one we could all have. Where people are warm in their homes, safe in a high-skilled job, paying affordable energy bills – and starting to address the climate crisis at the same time.

We mustn't keep yearning for the past, when there is so much potential for a bright future ahead. And that future starts by keeping this coal in the ground.

Caroline Lucas is the Green MP for Brighton Pavilion

Cumbria coalmine approval shows Sunak does not care if he is seen as green

Fiona Harvey Environment editor

▲ *Ffos-y-Fran opencast coalmine in Merthyr Tydfil, Wales in November 2021. Photograph: Matthew Horwood/Getty Images*

Opening a new coalmine when the world stands on the brink of climate catastrophe is "absolutely indefensible", in the words of the UK government's independent climate adviser, the chair of the Climate Change Committee and the former Conservative minister Lord Deben.

The £165m mine in Cumbria will produce coking coal for steelmaking, which the government has said will still be needed, even though steelmakers must move to low-carbon production in the next 13 years. Two of the UK's existing steel companies have rejected the new coal, which means much of it will be exported to a world already awash with fossil fuels.

Ron Deelen, a former chief executive of British Steel, said: "This is a completely unnecessary step for the British steel industry, which is not waiting for more coal as there is enough on the free market available. The British steel industry needs green investment in electric arc furnaces and hydrogen to protect jobs and make the UK competitive."

The decision, and the prime minister, Rishi Sunak, have been roundly condemned around the world. At the UN Cop27 climate summit last month, one of the key flashpoints was the charge of hypocrisy levelled by the developing world against rich countries that have preached lower emissions to the poor while pursuing fossil fuels themselves. The rift threatens to reverse the progress made at the UK-hosted Cop26 summit in Glasgow last year, where the UK succeeded in committing all countries to limit global heating to 1.5C above pre-industrial levels.

"As a historical emitter responsible for the current state of the climate crisis, the UK cannot expand or invest in any new fossil fuel projects," said Tasneem Essop, the executive director of Climate Action Network International. "No coal, no gas, no oil. They need to start demonstrating their commitment to 1.5C through actions and not just words."

Pressing ahead with the Cumbrian mine shows that Sunak has little interest in whether his government is seen as green or not. This week, he made a U-turn on onshore wind, with the first moves to partially relax the ban on onshore turbines in England announced just ahead of the coalmine. He may also relent further on solar farms, as the environment secretary, Thérèse Coffey, hinted on Tuesday they could be built on mid-grade agricultural land pending a review set for the middle of next year. Soon after taking office in October, Sunak also restored the moratorium on fracking.

But these apparently positive moves should be seen as short-term tactical decisions, taken in light of parliamentary manoeuvrings, public pressure and the urgent need to expand the UK's energy supplies in the wake of the Ukraine war. They do not denote a coherent green vision.

Green Tories hark back fondly to Boris Johnson, whose green record in government may have been patchy but whose soaring rhetoric at least was reliably eco-friendly. Sunak has no such pretensions – he publicly dithered over whether to attend Cop27, souring relations with the developing world and disappointing allies such as the US and the EU. When he finally changed his mind and attended, he still forbade the king to go, a kick to the many Commonwealth countries in which King Charles is head of state and a cold shoulder to the Egyptian hosts (who retaliated by inviting Johnson).

The Cumbrian decision has been taken while the fate of the planet is being decided by world governments once again at the Cop15 summit on biodiversity in Montreal this week. Under Johnson, the UK championed the idea of conserving 30% of the planet for nature by 2030, the centrepiece pledge of Cop15. Under Sunak, who is not going to Canada, the UK is not on track to reach its own nature protection targets.

By nearly every green measure, the UK is failing. A scathing report by Deben's Climate Change Committee this summer showed "major policy failures" and "scant evidence of delivery" on everything from public transport and food consumption to farming and tree-planting. Sunak's policies since then have done little to remedy the situation.

While people on low incomes are being forced to choose between eating and heating, at least a quarter of heating energy is wasted in leaks from the draughtiest housing stock in western Europe. An announced boost to insulation will result in about 70,000 more homes being insulated over three years but that falls well short of the nationwide programme of retrofit for 14m homes that experts and the building industry have called for.

The switch from gas to heat pumps is moving at glacial speed, muddied by claims that hydrogen could be used instead in boilers despite expert advice that this is technically impossible. Even with the deadline on sales of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030, greenhouse gas emissions from transport remain stubbornly high, fuelled by rising numbers of SUVs, the chaos in our rail networks and an absence of buses for most of the country outside London.

There are green voices within Sunak's cabinet. Michael Gove, a self-identified "shy green Tory", was acclaimed as one of the UK's best environment secretaries, who brought forward a 25-year environmental plan and started three key pieces of legislation – the Environment Act, Agriculture Act and Fisheries Act – during his two-year tenure from 2017 to 2019. The business secretary, Grant Shapps, was an enthusiastic attender at Cop27, telling an aide beforehand "I really believe this stuff".

Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor of the exchequer, joined the Conservative Environment Network early this year while on the backbenches, proclaiming: "Now. more than ever, in light of the global gas crisis and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it's vital we decarbonise the UK's economy by 2050. We must develop more homegrown clean energy, including renewables and new nuclear. This will lower people's bills, strengthen our energy security and avoid the worst consequences of climate change."

Yet Gove has been made the frontman for the Cumbrian mine decision, and Hunt and Shapps have been given minimal cash for green policy. Sunak demoted Alok Sharma who, after the success of Cop26, was probably the UK's most recognisable and lauded green champion internationally, after the king and Sir David Attenborough. The climate minister, Graham Stuart, was stripped of the right to attend cabinet.

Scientists have made it clear this year, in the "bleakest warning yet" by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, that this decade is crucial if the world is to limit global heating to 1.5C, a target now looking increasingly difficult but no less vital. Worldwide, emissions must be cut by half in the 2020s, compared with 2010 levels. That will require concerted global action, particularly from the world's biggest economies, which are responsible for by far the biggest share of cumulative emissions.

In the remaining two years before a general election, there is much that this government could do – insulating houses, improving public transport, expanding clean energy. All of these, though requiring public investment, would quickly help to put cash back into people's pockets, generate new jobs and alleviate the cost of living crisis. Failure to take these measures now will mean more costly action is needed in the future, when it may be too late. Two years is a big chunk of a crucial decade.

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What is the Cumbrian coalmine and why does it matter?

Fiona Harvey Environment editor

▲ A view of Whitehaven in Cumbria, north-west England, near the site of the proposed new coalmine. Photograph: Jon Super/AP

What is the Cumbrian coalmine?

A new coalmine, the Woodhouse Colliery, has been proposed at a site near Whitehaven in Cumbria, with £165m investment and a production capacity of about 2.8m tonnes of coal a year. The proposal has been mooted for more than two years.

Ministers at first offered a green light, but high-profile opposition to the proposal as the UK prepared to take on the presidency of the Cop26 UN climate summit in 2021 prompted a rethink.

After a public inquiry, a decision was expected in the summer but was delayed by the Tory party leadership contest and then put off again until after the Cop27 UN climate summit, which finished last month.

Haven't we stopped using coal?

The use of coal for electricity generation has been close to being phased out in the UK, though some use has been continued due to gas shortage fears after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

However, the proposed minewould produce coking coal used for making steel, rather than thermal coal for electricity generation.

Supporters say coking coal is likely to be needed for some years, as green methods of making steel have yet to be widely adopted.

Would the coal be lower carbon than alternatives?

Some have argued that using Cumbrian coal would produce less carbon than importing coal for steel-making from other regions, such as Russia.

However, at least two UK steelmakers have ruled out using coal from the Cumbrian mine, and steel-makers across Europe are increasingly turning to low-carbon steel-making techniques, such as electric arc furnaces with energy from windfarms and other renewable sources.

That means the market for such coal is likely to be limited. The coal is also expected to be high in sulphur and therefore liable to be rejected even by steel-makers still using coal.

About 83% of the coal produced from the mine would be for export, according to estimates, which would add to global greenhouse gas emissions.

Would the new mine create jobs?

About 500 jobs would be associated with the mine, according to its proponents. Detractors point out that building onshore windfarms – until recently subject to a ban in England – would produce many times more jobs and an ongoing source of clean energy.

There are also moves to start other green technology businesses in the north of England, from hydrogen and carbon capture and storage to electric vehicles. Using ground source heat networks in the north-east could create 15,000 jobs, according to one study, and restoring nature could also produce as many as 16,000 jobs around the country, focusing on rural areas such as Cumbria.

How does a new mine fit with the UK's net zero targets?

The coalmine would increase emissions by about 400,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year, or the equivalent of 200,000 cars on the road.

The UK is legally committed to cutting greenhouse gas emissions to net zero – the point at which any remaining emissions are balanced out by the amount of carbon absorbed by the UK's trees and soils – by 2050.

The mine could be scheduled to shut down by 2049, and therefore still fall technically within the net zero goal.

Who is in favour of the new mine?

The Tory MP for Workington, Mark Jenkinson, has described it as a way of reducing the UK's carbon footprint. "As Britain still needs coking coal for the foreseeable future to make our world-leading steel, it should come from here, not imported thousands of miles away – which will only increase our carbon footprint further," he told the Sun.

Some of his "red wall" Tory colleagues see it as part of the effort to level up deprived areas in the north of England. On the right wing of the Tory party, the Net Zero Scrutiny Group is against the net zero target, and some of those MPs want the mine to go ahead.

Who is against the new mine?

Alok Sharma was the cabinet minister who received widespread acclaim on the world stage when he led the UK's successful presidency of the Cop26 UN climate summit in Glasgow last year. Demoted to the backbenches by Rishi Sunak, he has taken his opportunity to speak out. He told the Observer: "Over the past three years the UK has sought to persuade other nations to consign coal to history because we are fighting to limit global warming to 1.5C, and coal is the most polluting energy source. A decision to open a new coalmine would send completely the wrong message and be an own goal. This proposed new mine will have no impact on reducing energy bills or ensuring our energy security."

Lord Stern of Brentford, an acclaimed economist who has worked on the climate, development and public policy, added: "Opening a coalmine in the UK now is a serious mistake: economic, social, environmental, financial and political. Economically, it is investing in the technologies of the last century, not this, and that is the wrong path to growth. Socially, it is pursuing jobs in industries that are on the way out, creating future job insecurity. Environmentally, it is adding to world supply and thus consumption of coal and releasing greenhouse gases, when there is an urgent need to reduce them. And politically, it is undermining the UK's authority on the most important global issue of our time."

Will a new mine in the UK make any difference, when China is expanding its coal use?

China is the world's biggest consumer of coal and is still building new coal-fired power plants. However, experts say many of the new planned coal plants are unlikely to ever be built, and China is working on peaking its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, with experts saying it could peak as soon as 2025.

A new coalmine in Cumbria would produce far less carbon than China's planned expansion, but it would fuel criticism of the UK as a "hypocritical" developed country for advocating the phaseout of coal around the world while planning its expansion at home.

How will other countries react to a new coalmine in the UK?

Experts on the UN climate negotiations and activists in developing countries have said any decision to go ahead would be disastrous for the UK's reputation on climate internationally. It could even put at risk global progress on cutting greenhouse gas emissions because laggard countries will be able to point to the UK's hypocrisy as an excuse for their own inaction.

Tensions between the developed and developing world have already been high, as seen at the recent Cop27 summit where rows over the failures of developed countries nearly derailed the talks. A new mine in the UK would inflame that situation further, to the detriment of climate hopes.

Talk to the animals? Study shows some human understanding of creatures' sounds

Nicola Davis Science correspondent

▲ The study looked at six species, including goats. Photograph: Anadolu Agency/Getty

It might not be animal communication Dr Dolittle-style, but researchers have found humans are able to glean insights into the feelings of creatures including pigs, horses and goats based on their vocalisations.

The team say the findings suggest certain information within sounds, such as how intense an animal's emotions are, appears to be conveyed in a similar way across species.

"[People] probably base their decisions on their knowledge of how humans sound when they're more or less aroused … because arousal, which is linked to stress pathways, is a system that is well conserved across vertebrates," said Dr Elodie Briefer, co-author of the research from the University of Copenhagen.

They also looked whether people could determine whether an animal was expressing a positive or negative emotion.

"We cannot really rely on what we know from humans because it varies a lot between species – there are lots of differences in how species express emotions, even closely related ones," said Briefer.

Writing in the journal Royal Society Open Science, Briefer and colleagues report how they recorded vocalisations from six animal species – horses, pigs, goats, cattle, Przewalski's horses (wild horses) and wild boars. The team noted whether the sound was made when the animal was aroused – as determined by a high heart rate or movement – and whether the sound was made in a positive context, such anticipating food, or a negative context, such as being isolated.

For humans, the team used existing recordings of meaningless strings of speech spoken in rage or in fear to represent higher and lower emotional intensity – or arousal – respectively, and in an angry or joyful way to suggest a negative or positive context.

The researchers then asked 1,024 participants from 48 countries to each listen online to pairs of the sounds.

For each species, participants were played four pairs of vocalisations. For two pairs they were asked to rate the emotional intensity of the sound as high or low, while for the other two pairs they were asked to rate the emotion as positive or negative.

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The results reveal that, overall, participants correctly rated the emotional intensity of the subject 54.1% of the time, and type of emotion 55.3% of the time.

However when the team analysed the data further, they found the participants only did better than chance on both metrics when assessing vocalisations from pigs, horses, goats, humans, and – for type of emotion only – wild boars.

"People are in general better at recognising domestic than wild species," said Briefer.

The arousal level of pigs and horses was rated correctly 59% and 58% of the time respectively, compared with 55% for humans, while their type of emotion was rated correctly 58% and 64% of the time respectively, compared with 68% for humans.

"We're quite confident that when it is higher than chance it is definitely higher than chance," said Briefer, adding that while ratings might have been high for horses because many participants reported contact with such animals, the relatively low success rate for most species, including humans, could be down to both the brevity of the recordings, and the use of the same type of sound for each pair of vocalisations – such as mooing for cows or whinnying for horses.

Briefer added participants' success in rating the type of emotions varied far more than their ability to determine the intensity of the emotions.

"If we take it to the next level, we can very likely easily train people to recognise the sounds," she said, noting that could help those working closely with animals – from farmers to pet owners – to understand them better.

"In the past, scientists used to focus on physical health for assessing animal welfare. Nowadays, most of us recognise the large role that emotions play."

DNA from 2m years ago reveals lost Arctic world

Hannah Devlin Science correspondent

▲ *This illustration provided by researchers depicts Kap København, Greenland, 2m years ago. Photograph: Beth Zaiken/AP*

Two-million-year-old DNA from northern Greenland has revealed that the region was once home to mastodons, lemmings and geese, offering unprecedented insights into how climate change can shape ecosystems.

The breakthrough in ancient DNA analysis pushes back the DNA record by 1m years to a time when the Arctic region was 11-19C warmer than the present day. The analysis reveals that the northern peninsula of Greenland, now a polar desert, once featured boreal forests of poplar and birch trees teeming with wildlife. The work offers clues to how species might adapt, or be genetically engineered, to survive the threat of rapid global heating.

Prof Eske Willerslev of the University of Cambridge and the University of Copenhagen, said: "A new chapter spanning 1m extra years of history has finally been opened and for the first time we can look directly at the DNA of a past ecosystem that far back in time."

The fragments are 1m years older than the previous record for DNA sampled from a Siberian mammoth bone. "DNA can degrade quickly but we've shown that under the right circumstances, we can now go back further in time than anyone could have dared imagine," said Willerslev.

In future, similar techniques might be used to uncover new insights into the first humans and their ancestors, he added.

Willerslev and colleagues worked for 16 years on the project, which resulted in the DNA of 41 samples found hidden in clay and quartz being sequenced and identified. The ancient DNA samples were found buried deep in the Kap København Formation, a sediment deposit almost 100 metres thick that built up over 20,000 years. The sediment, tucked in the mouth of a fjord in the Arctic Ocean in Greenland's northernmost point, was eventually preserved in ice or permafrost and lay undisturbed by humans for 2m years.

Extracting and analysing the DNA was a painstaking process that involved piecing together tiny fragments of genetic material that first needed to be detached from clay and quartz sediment. It was only the advent of a new generation of DNA sequencing techniques that allowed the scientists to identify and piece together extremely small and damaged fragments of DNA, through referencing extensive libraries of DNA collected from present-day animals, plants and microorganisms.

A picture emerged of forests populated by reindeer, hares, lemmings and mastodons, aelephant-like ice age mammals that have previously only been found in North and Central America.

The samples did not reveal any carnivores – probably because they were fewer in number – but the scientists speculated that there may have been ancient bears, wolves or sabre-toothed tigers. "We don't know what was there, but probably something that ate mastodons and reindeers," said Willerslev.

The authors say it is encouraging that these species were able to thrive so far north in a region that would still have been cast into darkness for much of the winter, despite warmer temperatures.

"The data suggests that more species can evolve and adapt to wildly varying temperatures than previously thought," said Dr Mikkel Pedersen, of the Lundbeck Foundation GeoGenetics Centre at the University of Copenhagen and co-first author.

However, the speed of global heating today means that many species will not have enough time to adapt, meaning that the climate emergency remains a huge threat to biodiversity. Willerslev and colleagues said studying ancient ecosystems could provide clues to how some species were genetically adapted to a warmer climate.

"It is possible that genetic engineering could mimic the strategy developed by plants and trees 2m years ago to survive in a climate characterised by rising temperatures and prevent the extinction of some species, plants and trees," said Prof Kurt Kjær, of Copenhagen University and a co-author. "This is one of the reasons this scientific advance is so significant because it could reveal how to attempt to counteract the devastating impact of global warming."

The findings are published in the journal Nature.

UK woman whose children were removed against their wishes loses appeal

Hannah Summers

▲ *Family division president Sir Andrew McFarlane said he would reinforce need for courts to follow guidance on appointing experts in his judgment. Photograph: Michael Lusmore/*

A mother whose children were removed from her care against their wishes after an unregulated psychologist said she had "alienated" them from their father has lost a high court appeal to have her case reopened.

The landmark test case came before the president of the family division in England and Wales, Sir Andrew McFarlane, who has said he will reinforce the need for the courts to follow guidance on appointing experts in his forthcoming judgment.

During the public hearing, held remotely, the court heard that under the current rules "anyone can call themselves a psychologist" and that there was no definition of "an expert".

The appeal came after a judge in Peterborough refused to order a rehearing after the mother complained that the psychologist who assessed her children was "not an appropriately qualified expert".

Judge Lindsay Davies ruled the children should move to live with their father after accepting Melanie Gill's "conclusions about alienation".

Gill was appointed in 2020 after being put forward by the children's guardian, the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), but her CV was not properly scrutinised prior to her instruction, lawyers for the Association of Clinical Psychologists UK (ACP-UK) told the hearing on Tuesday.

Barbara Mills KC, who was representing the professional body as an intervenor in the case, asserted that in the absence of regulation, the onus was on Gill to satisfy the court she was qualified to do the work she was instructed to carry out.

▲ *Melanie Gill outside the Royal Courts of Justice in London. Photograph: James Manning/PA*

Mills said that if her CV had been before the court and current Family Justice Council guidance had been applied, Gill "would simply not have been

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instructed”.

McFarlane said: “The guidance is admirable and is to be followed but someone who does not follow it is not acting unlawfully.” He added: “The fact nobody looked at her CV does not mean that she is not qualified.”

Representing Gill, Andrew Bagchi KC rejected the criticisms of Gill and said the burden was not on her to prove her qualifications. He said she had made clear at the outset what the scope of her work would entail, adding that the appeal was not a “conventional” one and had become a “technical debate”.

At a previous hearing, he claimed his client had been the victim of a “witch-hunt”.

Bagchi told the hearing that beyond supplying her CV Gill had emailed the solicitor for Cafcass “explaining she was neither a doctor, nor regulated and what her approach would be”. She “outlined her training in child and adult psychological assessments”, said Bagchi.

In a written case outline, Bagchi said Gill had been clear “she is not trained in any of the types of psychology regulated by the HCPC [Health and Care Professions Council]”.

He added: “Anyone can call themselves a psychologist as long as they do not use one of seven protected titles. If the ACP-UK want this changed they should talk to parliament about it.”

Representing the mother, Joy Brereton KC argued Gill was a “risk to the public” and that psychologists were regulated to protect the public.

She said “nobody checked” Gill’s qualifications at the start of process. “So what we are left with ultimately is an expert in inverted commas, somebody who calls herself a psychologist who didn’t really go through with the relevant processes. And I hear what you say, ‘this is just guidance’. But what is the point, with the greatest respect, of having Family Justice Council guidance … ?”

McFarlane responded: “I wasn’t belittling the guidance. I was looking for an authoritative statement that said this person is or is not a psychologist, or is or is not entitled to be an expert because that is the way it is being put and the guidance falls short of that bright-line character.”

He added: “You can rest assured the judgment from this hearing will reinforce the need for the courts to follow the guidance.”

Brereton said only psychologists who came into contact with the public were regulated, so academics who did not work with the public could also give their opinions.

But she added: “Ms Gill doesn’t fall into that category. She provides the court with assessments. She is technically a risk to the public when she is carrying out those assessments and I pose this question: why wouldn’t the family court use this hearing as an opportunity to flag up that as a justice system we shouldn’t be instructing unregulated psychologists?”

But McFarlane dismissed the appeal, adding: “Part of the judgment will be to look at the bigger picture and to offer guidance but I am clear that the appeal on the substantive issue should be dismissed.”

The judgment will be handed down at later date.

Aaron Judge reportedly signs $360m, nine-year contract with New York Yankees

Associated Press

Aaron Judge is staying with the New York Yankees on a $360m, nine-year contract, according to a person familiar with the deal.

The source confirmed the deal to the Associated Press and Judge’s new contract was reported by multiple other outlets, including ESPN and MLB Network.

Judge will earn $40m per season, the highest average annual payout for a position player. The contract trails only Mike Trout’s $426.5m deal with the Los Angeles Angels and Mookie Betts’ $365m pact with the Los Angeles Dodgers for biggest in baseball history. The latter two players’ contracts are for 12 years, meaning they earn less per year than Judge.

Judge was offered a long-term deal by New York before last season that was worth $213.5m over seven years from 2023-29. But he turned it down in the hours before opening day in April.

▲ Aaron Judge was selected by New York in the first round of the 2013 and made his big league debut in 2016. Photograph: Brad Penner/USA Today Sports

The 6ft 7in Judge bet on himself and won. He set an American League record with 62 homers in 2022, powering the Yankees to the AL East title. He also tied for the major league lead with 131 RBIs and just missed a Triple Crown with a .311 batting average. New York were swept by Houston in the AL Championship Series, but Judge became the first AL MVP for the Yankees since Alex Rodriguez in 2007.

By rejecting the Yankees’ preseason offer, the 30-year-old gained $146.5m and an extra two guaranteed seasons. The northern California native also visited with the San Francisco Giants last month, and there were most likely more teams monitoring the market for the slugger.

Judge’s decision will have a domino effect on several teams and free agents. His status held up at least some of New York’s offseason plans, but general manager Brian Cashman made it clear his team would wait patiently to see what Judge wanted to do.

In the end, the patient approach worked.

Judge was selected by New York in the first round of the 2013 amateur draft and made his big league debut in 2016, homering in his first at-bat. A year later, he was one of baseball’s breakout stars. He hit .284 with 52 homers and 114 RBIs in 2017, winning the AL Rookie of the Year award. The four-time All-Star has 220 homers and 497 RBIs in seven big league seasons.

Struggling Rams claim former No 1 overall pick Baker Mayfield off waivers

Associated Press

The Los Angeles Rams claimed quarterback Baker Mayfield off waivers on Tuesday, adding the former No 1 pick to their options behind injured Matthew Stafford for the rest of the season.

Mayfield, the 2017 Heisman Trophy winner and former Cleveland Browns starter, was released by the Panthers on Monday at his request after seven disappointing games with Carolina.

The struggling Rams host the Las Vegas Raiders on Thursday night, and it’s unclear whether Mayfield could be ready to participate for a team already down to backup quarterbacks John Wolford, who has been battling a neck injury and other ailments, and Bryce Perkins.

“My gosh, you’d probably know as much as I would on that right now,”

▲ Baker Mayfield struggled to establish himself at the Carolina Panthers. Photograph: Patrick Semansky/AP

Rams offensive coordinator Liam Coen told reporters when asked if Mayfield might play Thursday. “I couldn’t tell you. I haven’t spoken to him. I’ve only heard great things about him, his professional nature in Carolina and some of the things that went on there.”

Rams head coach Sean McVay wasn’t scheduled to speak to reporters on Tuesday after he acquired a quarterback whose talents greatly intrigued him coming out of college at Oklahoma, but both of his coordinators praised the acquisition.

“I’ve got a lot of respect for him,” Rams defensive coordinator Raheem Morris said. “This guy was a very good football player. Brought Cleveland from pretty much the ashes. This game is sometimes thankless. We get a chance to acquire guys who’ve got nothing to lose and something to prove is always awesome.”

After league-wide speculation about Mayfield joining the contending San Francisco 49ers or Baltimore Ravens, Mayfield instead will attempt to help the injury-plagued Rams (3-9). Los Angeles have lost six straight games during what’s shaping up as the worst season in NFL history for a defending Super Bowl champion.

The Rams have almost no reason to tank the remaining season because their first-round pick belongs to Detroit, and they need help at quarterback. Stafford is almost certainly out for the season with a bruised spinal cord, and Wolford and Perkins have been fairly ineffective while combining to start three of the past four games, all losses. Wolford passed for 178 yards with no touchdowns in last Sunday’s loss to Seattle.

But it’s unclear how much help Mayfield can provide: He had a dismal season with the Panthers, who acquired him for a fifth-round pick in July after the Browns’ acquisition of Deshaun Watson ended his up-and-down tenure in Cleveland, where he was a four-year starter and engineered the end of the franchise’s 18-year playoff drought in 2020.

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Mayfield won the first-string job in training camp with Carolina, but went 1-5 as a starter while throwing six touchdown passes and six interceptions. He was outplayed in recent weeks by both Sam Darnold and PJ Walker.

McVay frequently received credit for Kirk Cousins' development into a solid NFL starter during McVay's time as Washington's offensive coordinator. As a head coach, McVay led the Rams to four winning seasons, three playoff berths and a Super Bowl appearance with Jared Goff at the controls. McVay then became the youngest coach in NFL history to win a Super Bowl title last season after trading Goff for Stafford, who had one of the most impressive seasons of his lengthy career.

Whether this latest partnership lasts only five games or goes longer, McVay will have the opportunity to decide whether Mayfield can still be the quarterback McVay thought he would be coming out of Oklahoma.

"It's a chance to evaluate," Coen said. "You're always looking for competition at every position, and you're looking for a chance to evaluate talent. That was the goal. … We feel good about our room and the quarterback that we have for the future of the Los Angeles Rams, which is Matthew Stafford, but we feel obviously pretty good about somebody to come in here and compete at a high level for us."

The 34-year-old Stafford is under contract through the 2026 season, but his injuries and two trips through the concussion protocol – even though the Rams haven't confirmed he ever had a concussion this season – have sparked widespread speculation about how long he plans to continue his career.

World Cup 2022 power rankings: how the remaining eight teams shape up

Nick Ames in Doha

The *Seleção* are in full flight and, as you may have heard, enjoying themselves in the process. Their first-half evisceration of South Korea felt like a throwback, moments such as Richarlison's seal impression offering reminders of those days when nobody could rival Brazil for sheer fun. Even without Gabriel Jesus they retain a depth of attacking talent few can match, partly thanks to Neymar's Lazarus-like recovery from injury. Keep this up and a first World Cup since 2002 should be theirs, although there are caveats: they squeezed past Switzerland, the only practised tournament side they have faced, and Croatia should offer an even sterner test on Friday. Alisson Becker was also worked harder than he may have liked on Monday night, although he demonstrated the value of a top-class keeper in the process. Can anyone stop them?

Sometimes it feels France's plan is to send possession Kylian Mbappé's way and say: "You do the rest." The problem for their opponents is that it tends to work. Anyone who can halt Mbappé may be able to stop *Les Bleus* but he is in virtually unplayable form and already looks a safe bet for the Golden Boot. Didier Deschamps will also be encouraged that the supporting cast is showing signs of life and France, who have scored nine goals across the three games in which he has selected a first-choice side, may be clicking at the right time. The evergreen Olivier Giroud adds a valuable balance while Aurélien Tchouaméni has taken to life as their midfield linchpin. Further injuries would give Deschamps a headache but the core look in lean shape.

▲ From left; Lucas Paquetá, Jude Bellingham, Lionel Messi, Julián Álvarez and Achraf Hakimi will have a say in where the World Cup ends up. Composite: Getty; Shutterstock

That wasn't so difficult, was it? Now that Fernando Santos has, perhaps terminally, cut the cord with Cristiano Ronaldo the tournament seems alive with possibility for Portugal. They were devastating against Switzerland, a rejuvenated frontline slicing their unusually loose opponents open at will and Gonçalo Ramos coming from nowhere to become a potential star of this winter. Beating decent Ghana and Uruguay sides in the group stage was further evidence of the weapons Santos has in his armoury, which include a potent substitute in Rafael Leão. They will not be devastated at facing Morocco on Saturday, who spent 120 minutes on a highly rewarding but hugely exacting task in defeating Spain. Could Ronaldo's much-sought World Cup be won from the sidelines?

Gareth Southgate's players will find France a clear step up from several lower-key assignments but it would not take an over-active imagination to see them pull through on Saturday. There were rocky moments early on against Senegal but England have some of the best young players in the tournament – Jude Bellingham has announced himself as an essential pick – and are a gripping proposition when on the front foot. When they are denied space, much of their possession can appear sterile: France will know that and may be content to utilise their own speed through counterattacks. But Harry Kane has opened his account, the midfield looks well-balanced and defensive bloopers have been minimised: could it be coming home for Christmas?

Every Argentina match in Doha feels like appointment viewing, if not for the fare produced by Lionel Scaloni's team then for the jaw-dropping support that turns stadiums into pulsating places of worship. *La Albiceleste* have only shone in flashes but have done well to banish that remarkable defeat by Saudi Arabia, and one thing is clear: Lionel Messi is already enjoying his best World Cup, scoring three times and operating on a different level to everyone else. There are signs his younger teammates are raising theirs: Julián Álvarez is showing why Manchester City brought him to the Etihad and the Benfica midfielder Enzo Fernández looks an outstanding talent. They still need to put it together against the best but with supporters that make it feel like they have home advantage, Argentina have a chance.

There is a sense Louis van Gaal's team has flown beneath the radar so far but, like others, they are stirring at a convenient point. Critics accused them of boring football during an unremarkable group stage but Memphis Depay and Cody Gakpo – the latter was certainly exempt from criticism in earlier games – shone against the USA and Denzel Dumfries was outstanding at right wing-back. Frenkie de Jong was also back to his best and their tie with Argentina, a reprise of previous classics, looks finely poised. The Netherlands are unbeaten in 19 games since Van Gaal's return and, while he would still like greater control in possession, can be rapier-like in the transition. If Messi is to land the biggest prize, he has a stiff hurdle to overcome on Friday.

Morocco showed in the group stage that they are a serious team and everyone is awake to that now after they dumped Spain out. Walid Regragui oversees a tough, clever unit with extraordinary tactical discipline and an attack capable of the unexpected. The only goal they have conceded was a consolation in the win over Canada and that is some achievement given they have played Croatia, Belgium and Spain. Shutting out Portugal on Saturday would top the lot and Morocco have a chance. In Achraf Hakimi they possess a genuine star, while Luis Enrique can testify to the qualities of the midfield whirlwind, Azzedine Ounahi. And nobody can discount a flash of genius from Hakim Ziyech. Africa has never had a representative in the last four and Morocco are a win away from making history.

▲ Kylian Mbappé in full flow for France in the 3-1 defeat of Poland. Photograph: Foto Olimpik/NurPhoto/Shutterstock

You know the old saying: never write off the Croatians. In all seriousness, Zlatko Dalic's team have a whiff of past Germany sides about them: they never know when they are beaten and, while they are creaking in some departments, few know their way around a tournament more adeptly. They were on the ropes against a sparky Japan but pulled through; Ivan Perisic's equaliser was a reminder that half this squad still boasts several World Cup finalists and that counts for plenty when fine margins need navigating. Whether they can handle Brazil's attacking tempo remains to be seen but it would be foolhardy to rule them out on Friday. One way or another, Croatia have a habit of making you play on their terms.

Qatar World Cup whistleblower was tortured, claims family

Sean Ingle in Doha

A Qatari whistleblower who was jailed after raising concerns about the mistreatment of migrant workers at World Cup stadium sites was tortured on the eve of the tournament, his family has claimed.

The human rights organisation FairSquare also released a letter from the family of Abdullah Ibhais, a former media manager in Qatar's Supreme Committee, who accused Fifa of "callous indifference" for ignoring his case.

FairSquare is now calling for the

▲ Abdullah Ibhais is serving a three-year sentence. Photograph: © 2021 Abdullah

United Nations working group on arbitrary detention to intervene in the hope that Ibhais will be released from his three-year jail sentence.

In the letter Ibhais's family claims he spent four days "in complete darkness in solitary confinement after being physically assaulted" as punishment for contributing to last month's ITV documentary Qatar: State of Fear? – with the air conditioning at full blast and used as a torture device. "He was in a cell of two by one metres with a hole in the ground as a bathroom and with temperatures near freezing," the letter adds. "'I was already suffering from several bruises after the prison guards' assault and I was shivering all the time, as the cold air directed to me never stopped. 'I hardly slept during those four days,' he told us."

Ibhais says he was jailed after raising concerns that the Supreme Committee planned to deny that World Cup workers were involved in a strike of between 4,000 and 6,000 people in Doha. He says he found 200 workers in Education City Stadium and Al Bayt Stadium that had no drinking water and had not been paid for four months. However, Qatar's authorities insist that Ibhais, who was removed from his role in 2019, was sentenced on fraud charges relating to a contract to produce social media content for the World Cup. But that is disputed by Fair Square, which says he was coerced into a confession and denied a fair trial.

Nicholas McGeehan of FairSquare said Ibhais had gone to Fifa before his arrest. "He was messaging directly members of Fifa's human rights team," said McGeehan. "At some point, however, they just disappeared. They essentially ghosted him – for want of a better word – and he had no further communication from them after that."

Ibhais's family also directly criticises Fifa in its letter. "We the family of Abdullah Ibhais are calling out Fifa and its president Gianni Infantino, who once said 'the World Cup is the voice of

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the marginalised'," it states. "Your deeds haven't lived up to your words, Fifa is complicit in Abdullah's imprisonment and Fifa's silence is tearing apart our family. We refuse Fifa's callous indifference, we refuse to back down.

Fifa and the Supreme Committee were approached for comment. Both confirmed they were aware of the letter and its contents.

F1 announce sprint races for Azerbaijan, Austria, Belgium, Qatar, US and Brazil

Giles Richards

Formula One has confirmed the six venues that will host sprint races in the 2023 season. The sport will retain the current format for the sprint weekends in which the shortened 100km race will decide the grid for the grand prix on a Sunday.

The sprint race was introduced in 2021 and since then has been held at three meetings each year. F1 has been eager to expand the concept and next year sprint meetings will be held in Azerbaijan, Austria, Belgium, Qatar, the United States and Brazil. Of the six only Brazil and Austria have previously held sprint events.

Next season the weekends will proceed as they have in 2022. Qualifying will be held on a Friday, with the quickest driver claiming pole position for the weekend. That session will decide the grid for the sprint race on a Saturday contested over a 100km distance, usually equating to a race of approximately 30 minutes.

▲ Red Bull's Max Verstappen leads at the start of the sprint race in Austria in July 2022. Photograph: Leonhard Föger/Reuters

Points will be awarded to the top eight drivers on a sliding scale from eight points for the win. The fundamental issue of the driver who wins the race not being counted as having taken pole position for the grand prix itself, despite starting from the front of the grid, remains an awkward and unwieldy construction.

F1 considers the format to have been a great success in its opening two years and it is widely supported by race promoters, who enjoy an additional competitive session on a Friday, and similarly by broadcasters. F1 states it has increased revenue and audiences, with Friday qualifying replacing second practice, which has limited appeal.

However the general reaction from fans has been less enthusiastic. The majority of the races held thus far have been pedestrian at best, with drivers unwilling to take risks for fear of compromising their race on a Sunday. Equally the tense jeopardy of qualifying, the test under pressure in the single lap discipline, is a challenge many –drivers included – prefer.

F1 is known to want to further adjust the format, making the sprint an entirely standalone race, with its own qualifying session in order to encourage drivers to race more competitively. While that will not be adopted next season it remains under consideration for future years.

The new venues were chosen after research into how suitable circuits would be for short-format racing. F1 has emphasised the need for overtaking opportunities, close racing and high-speed sections as crucial to making for a successful sprint.

Manchester United have moved on from Cristiano Ronaldo, insists Erik ten Hag

PA Media

Erik ten Hag insists Manchester United have moved on from Cristiano Ronaldo's messy departure from the club last month.

Ten Hag was not willing to discuss the saga in depth when asked by the club's in-house TV channel, MUTV, in an interview that was aired on Wednesday. Rather, the Dutchman insisted his focus was on the future as he looks to continue the rebuilding job at Old Trafford that he began when he arrived in the summer.

United terminated Ronaldo's contract after being rocked by an extraordinary series of complaints by him in a TV interview. Ten Hag came in for particular criticism from the 37-year-old forward, who accused the Dutchman of not respecting him. Asked how he had managed the situation, Ten Hag told MUTV: "He's gone and it's the past. We are now looking forward and we're looking to the future."

United face Burnley in a Carabao Cup last-16 tie on 21 December before hosting Nottingham Forest in the Premier League six days later. Ten Hag is confident his squad will hit the ground running after breaking for the World Cup and said: "We had a plan, we have prepared the players with what the plan is, so there can't be any confusion about what the programme is.

"We make the players aware of the fact that, after you are out of the World Cup, you have to return to the club and the league immediately goes on. You have to be ready for that, but I think our players are used to it."

England can be 'even more adventurous' against Pakistan, says Ben Stokes

Ali Martin in Multan

Ben Stokes is prepared to get "even more adventurous" with his tactics as the England captain aims to continue pushing the limits of what is possible in Test cricket.

Speaking as he prepared for the second Test against Pakistan starting in Multan on Friday – a match that could see even shorter days than their 74-run win in Rawalpindi, because of fog – Stokes showed no interest in his side sitting on their 1-0 series lead.

▲ Ben Stokes has no interest in sitting on England's 1-0 series lead. Photograph: Matthew Lewis/Getty Images

Asked how much more inventive his side could get, having ransacked 921 runs from just 821 balls across their two innings in the first Test, and then set an inviting target on a flat pitch, Stokes said: "We might see, actually, in this Test.

"If it does pan out the way that it could, potentially, with the late start [for fog] and early finish [for bad light], we could end up having only 300-350 overs in the match. We might have to get even more adventurous with what we do."

The match may also challenge the fitness of both teams, with the pollution levels in Multan rated as "very unhealthy" on the air quality index and physical activity not recommended – somewhat suboptimal for a five-day cricket match.

Among the ideas floated by Stokes to keep the game moving were possible declarations in both innings, while 48 hours out the captain said he was open to retaining Ollie Pope as wicketkeeper despite Ben Foakes returning to fitness after a sickness bug.

With seven wins from eight after a previous one from 17 under predecessor Joe Root, it is clear there is no going back for this England side under Stokes and the head coach, Brendon McCullum, as they maintain their contempt for the draw.

"We'll stick to our guns and the way we want to play," Stokes said. "That's to go out there and try and make every single day of Test cricket entertaining and try to force results – not worrying about too much else.

"We've moved on from that first Test. Obviously it was a pretty special win. But I think we're very good at parking results. It's always about the next game, especially in a [three-match] series like this one where every game is back-to-back."

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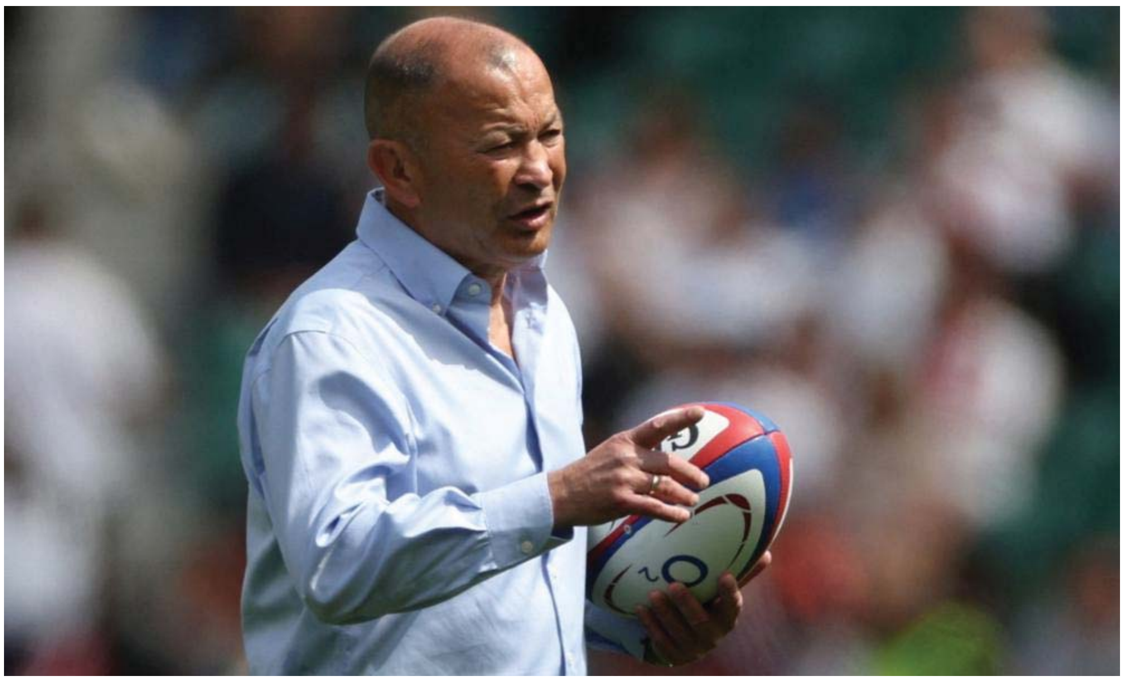
Eddie Jones lined up for rapid return to Twickenham with the Barbarians

Gerard Meagher



▲ *Eddie Jones last took charge of the Barbarians shortly after England's defeat to South Africa in the 2019 World Cup final. Photograph: Matthew Childs/Action Images/Reuters*

Eddie Jones's first major coaching role since he was sacked by England could involve a swift return to Twickenham – less than six months after he was shown the door by the Rugby Football Union.

Before Jones's seven-year tenure as England head coach ended on Tuesday it is believed he was being lined up by the Barbarians to take charge of the invitational side next May. It is understood there is no clause in Jones's severance package that would prevent him from taking a new job immediately but while the 62-year-old has already been touted for a move back to Australia – who had a mixed autumn – well-placed sources consider that a more likely proposition in 2024, after next year's World Cup.

Still, Jones is unlikely to be short of offers amid links to the USA as well as offers in Japan, while taking charge of the Barbarians could provide an early opportunity to show his former employers what they are missing in the buildup to next year's World Cup, right under their noses.

Jones's only previous spell in charge of the Barbarians came shortly after the 2019 World Cup and, though his side lost, he spoke of the healing qualities that came with the role so soon after England's defeat in the final by South Africa. Taking the reins of the Barbarians – in a fixture expected to be against a World XV – could prove cathartic again after he was denied another shot at a World Cup title, nine months before France 2023 begins. The fixture is scheduled to take place the day after the Premiership final and, though no members of England's World Cup squad are expected to be involved, Jones could, ironically enough, be overseeing a number of future internationals from within the Premiership.

Meanwhile, it is understood Jones's compensation package is significantly less than the £700,000 he would have earned if he had seen out his contract, which was due to expire in November next year. Jones was the top earner in international rugby but the RFU chief executive, Bill Sweeney, earlier this year dismissed suggestions that it would be prohibitively expensive to sack him.

Sweeney said: "Because he's been here for the length of time he's been here he's subject to UK employment law. He's the same as me or you. He has a notice period and that would be exercised under UK employment law. There's nothing financially that would have an impact on a decision."

Steve Borthwick can 'show pathway for English coaches' says Rob Baxter

Robert Kitson

▲ *Steve Borthwick is expected to replace Eddie Jones. Photograph: Bob Bradford/CameraSport/Getty Images*

Steve Borthwick will prove English-reared coaches are as talented as any of their overseas counterparts when he is formally anointed as Eddie Jones's successor, according to one of his main Premiership rivals. With the Rugby Football Union preparing to unveil Borthwick as the new national head coach, Exeter's Rob Baxter believes the pending appointment is a positive one which will be welcomed across the English game

On the day he and his Chiefs coaching staff confirmed new long-term deals to stay at Exeter for the next four years, Baxter suggested the entire Premiership will applaud the choice of an Englishman for the top role. "Personally, I think that's what should be happening," said Baxter, the last Premiership-based coach to win the European Cup. "If it's Steve and it's based on how he's worked through in the Premiership that for me would be fantastic. It would show there's a genuine pathway within this country and there's a general feeling across the board that that's what we're trying to achieve."

While Baxter has been taken aback by the timing of the decision to remove Jones nine months before next year's World Cup – "I was surprised the decision got made now" – he insists the Leicester man's lack of experience as a Test head coach will not be an issue. "I think people probably underestimate the challenges of the Premiership when it comes to team management," said Baxter, who works with numerous England squad members at Exeter.

"I've always been surprised [to be told] you have to have come from an international coaching environment to have the credentials. When you look at some club sides they have up to nine international players at times. And it's way harder to manage the internationals than it is in the Test environment. When you've got them coming and going and you're managing the relatively high injury attrition rate, you can't just bring in another team's best player to replace them. Your management scenario is actually a little harder."

Baxter, meanwhile, revealed he had "two or three" chats with the RFU's Nigel Redman who has been responsible for coaching succession planning at Twickenham but made clear it was his preference to remain at Exeter "for the foreseeable future." He sees no reason, though, why Borthwick cannot succeed in raising English morale despite the tough demands of the national team role.

"There is a simple way of looking at this: teams that are successful tend to enjoy what they do. Some of that enjoyment comes from genuine buy-in and from understanding how they want to play. I am not going to sit here and tell you I know how Steve Borthwick coaches but if you watched the Leicester guys last season you wouldn't have thought that was a joyless experience they were having, would you?

"Without doubt it's a challenging job. Managing a role within the RFU, along with people's expectations of what the coaches should be like and how the team should play, is obviously difficult. You may have to be a different character to deal with the spotlight that gets put on pretty much everything you say and the interviews you do. Every selection you make gets ripped to pieces, doesn't it? Here at Exeter if I make a selection it might get ripped to pieces by 10,000 people. If you make a selection for England it might get ripped apart by a million people. But that's the challenge, isn't it? The challenge isn't the day to day, it's that bigger environment."

Baxter is among those, however, who feel sacking Jones at this juncture is a big call. "On the whole Eddie has been pretty successful if you go game by game. The problem this autumn was quite a few things got magnified and it all came a little bit in one go. It is the slips that kill you and the slips get magnified more than the successes. I am surprised it happened at this stage just purely on timing. It does feel like it has happened rather quickly."

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This time England believe we can win World Cup, says Harry Maguire

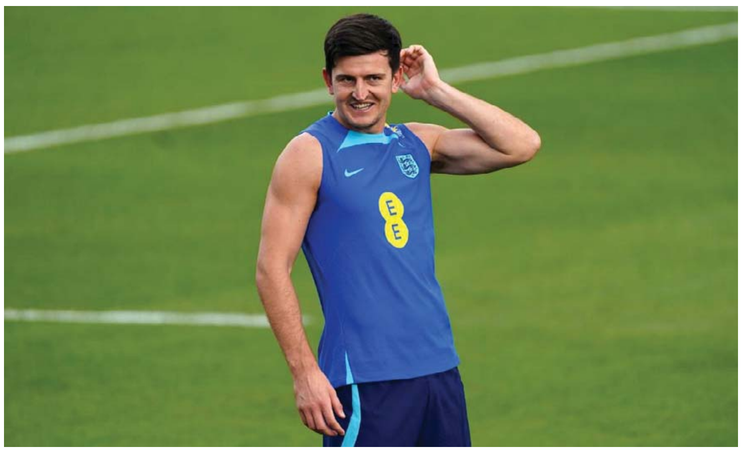
David Hytner in Doha

Harry Maguire frames it differently and it is some difference. His England teammates, when questioned in Qatar, have mostly said they can win the World Cup. It is the objective. They have not shied away from saying so. For Maguire, though, it goes beyond that. It is not only a target. As he prepares for Saturday night's quarter-final against France, it is an obligation.

"That's the one thing I'd say is a lot different from the 2018 squad," Maguire says. "I played when we got to the semi-final and a lot of the lads were happy. You knew that whatever happened in that semi-final [when they lost to Croatia], you'd go home and be classed as a hero; you'd get a good reception, everyone would be patting you on the back. Now there's a belief that we've got to win this tournament.

"Of course we know how tough it is going to be. There are probably five or six teams with the same belief. But in 2018 we probably weren't one of those teams. Now there's five or six who have that belief and we're one of them."

When considering Maguire or talking to him, it is impossible not to fixate on his mentality. Or, to put it another way, wonder how he copes with it all because, over the past year and a bit, Maguire has become a virtual by-word for calamity. That has to do something to a player, even one as long in the tooth as him.



▲ *Harry Maguire has started all four games for England in Qatar. Photograph: Adam Davy/*

It was a horrible season for him last time out. Manchester United were surely the worst version of themselves since the late 1980s and Maguire was a big part of that, making grisly errors. He looked leaden-footed, his confidence on the floor. But as the captain, he almost became the face of the listing ship.

Maguire's substitution against Atlético Madrid in the Champions League was cheered by a section of the Old Trafford crowd. For England, meanwhile, he was jeered at Wembley during the friendly against the Ivory Coast. Sticks and stones, perhaps. But then came the bomb threat to his family home, which was beyond the pale.

This season the abuse has not been as bad and maybe it is because he has not been seen as often. Dropped after the first two games by the new United manager, Erik ten Hag, Maguire has started only three times since – all at Old Trafford; Real Sociedad (Europa League defeat), West Ham (Premier League win), Aston Villa (Carabao Cup win).

Maguire was in at the outset for England in late September against Italy and Germany – he was poor in the second tie – and after that was unavailable for three weeks or so because of a thigh injury. When he departed for the World Cup, he was United's fourth-choice centre-half and there were plenty of people who did not want him in the lineup when England got underway against Iran. So how does he cope?

"First and foremost, I listen to people around me like my family and friends, my teammates, the staff here," Maguire says. "I know how valued I am, I feel it within the camp. That gives me great belief. I also go back to my past memories and performances at tournaments. In the summer of last year I was in the Euros team of the tournament. I know what I'm capable of."

It has to be hard to blot out all of the noise. Maguire cannot live under a rock. Last week he was even ridiculed in the Ghanaian parliament when an MP denigrated the vice-president as the "economic Maguire", accusing him of being a liability.

"You pick up bits and bobs and maybe my family read things more than me," Maguire says. "I tell them to stay off social media – maybe they don't because it's a habit for most people these days. But I'm 29 years old, I'm the captain of Man United and I've made 52 appearances for my country. I'm doing everything I always wanted to do.

"During a career there's only probably Lionel Messi and Cristiano [Ronaldo] who've not had a dip. There's no way, especially with all the scrutiny that is on defences these days, you're not going to have dips. It's how you bounce back from them."

Maguire has had a good World Cup so far, starting all four of England's ties, although he did have shaky moments during the early stages of the last-16 win against Senegal. He has felt the support of not only Southgate but the travelling fans, making light of his lack of regular football much as he did going into the last Euros; back then he was out for six weeks with an ankle prob-

▲ *Harry Maguire challenges Senegal's Boulaye Dia in the last-16 tie. Photograph: Martin Rickett/PA*

lem. He has also received a couple of "well done" messages from Ten Hag.

"As a player you want to play and this is the first season I've really sat on a bench in a few games," Maguire says. "But I'll fight to get my place back [at United]. I did manage to play the 90 minutes against West Ham and Villa after my thigh injury and I felt like I was coming into a little bit of form. You want to play in your rhythm and I'm glad I got the first few World Cup games out of the way. I'm in a rhythm of playing now. I'm in a good place."

This is not a redemption story. Not yet, anyway. The fear continues to lurk that Maguire could be exposed against France, particularly by the pace of Kylian Mbappé. But just imagine if Maguire could summon a command performance in victory. This is his life – ever on the end of a precipice. How does he cope? All told, pretty remarkably.

Raheem Sterling hopes to join England camp on Thursday after home burglary

Jacob Steinberg and David Hytner in Doha

Raheem Sterling hopes to fly back to Qatar on Thursday and rejoin England's World Cup camp before the side's quarter-final against France on Saturday.

Sterling has been finalising his security arrangements after the robbery at his Surrey home and does not want to leave the United Kingdom until he is satisfied that his family are safe.

Jewellery and watches were among the items stolen at the home of the England winger, who was forced to fly back to the UK to deal with the incident. Sterling, who missed England's last-16 victory over Senegal last Sunday, was understood to have been left "shaken" by the break-in and fearing for the safety of his fiancee and three children. The robbery is being investigated by Surrey police.

Sterling is prioritising his family's wellbeing before making any decision on whether to fly back to Qatar and

▲ *Raheem Sterling (right) has been put under no pressure by Gareth Southgate to return to England's World Cup squad. Photograph: Eddie Keogh/The FA/Getty Images*

return to England's Al Wakrah base. The 27-year-old, who has not been placed under any pressure by the England manager, Gareth Southgate, has been bolstering the security around his home and hopes to be able to rejoin his teammates on Thursday. If he makes it back to Qatar in time then he could be involved when England face France.

Southgate will still need to make an assessment on whether Sterling is ready to be part of the matchday squad against the world champions. The Chelsea forward, who has 20 goals in 81 caps, has been unable to take part in any preparations this week and has been through a difficult ordeal.

Equally, Southgate needs every attacking tool at his disposal against France and he will want strength in depth on the bench. Sterling had lost his place in England's starting lineup before flying home last Sunday, but he is one of the most experienced players in the squad and played a vital role in Southgate's side reaching the final of Euro 2020.

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Ramos, Ronaldo and a very public and brutal World Cup humiliation

Barry Glendenning

WITH OR WITHOUT HIM?

Yes, yes … we'll get to Him. Of course we will because even when his involvement is increasingly, almost comically peripheral, everything ultimately ends up being about Him. But first a nod to the players and supporters of Morocco, to whom Tuesday really belonged. Following the north African side's win against the throwback tiki-taka scamperers of Spain (possession: 77%, passes: 1,019, goals: 0), scarcely a U2 pun went unpunished as shootout hero Bono and chums celebrated a dogged, obdurate and thoroughly deserved victory.

On a truly Beautiful Day for Moroccan football, it was One in which their fans in Qatar, at home and elsewhere took understandably immense Pride. Scarcely a car horn went unparped on the streets of Casablanca by fans who will be hoping their team, who have conceded just one goal – an own goal – in their past eight matches can play it again in such fine style against Portugal, whose impressive demolition job on the Switzerland has been predictably overshadowed by the most conspicuous absence of the name "Ronaldo" from an official team sheet since the temporary omission of a certain Brazilian prior to the final in 1998.

▲ *Cristiano Ronaldo prepares to watch a young upstart trample all over his World Cup hopes and dreams. Photograph: Florencia Tan Jun/SPP/Shutterstock*

While it has since emerged that the Brazilian Ronaldo was ill and almost certainly should have sat that game out, his Portuguese namesake has been suffering from nothing more serious than an inflated sense of self-regard, a form of pyromania that has led him to incinerate a couple of big bridges in under a month. No longer the footballing force he once was, Cristiano Ronaldo remains an intimidating presence on the pitch but for some time now it has looked like it is only his own teammates, rather than opponents, who are cowed by him. "I'm quite surprised but not overly shocked," said the great Ally McCoist on ITV. "Having said that, I must say I am slightly shocked, of that there is no doubt." Not for the first time in this tournament, Coisty succinctly captured the global mood in a nutshell.

While Fernando Santos's decision to bench his show pony in favour of starting the young Benfica striker Gonçalo Ramos was a Big Call, it quickly proved the right one. Within 17 minutes the fresh-faced 21-year-old had passed Ronaldo's career tally of zero World Cup knockout stage goals and missed a couple of presentable chances but finished the game with this tournament's first hat-trick. And while the man he replaced joined in the goal celebrations before helping to close out the game ahead of an abrupt post-match scuttle down the tunnel, we can but guess what he made of what was ultimately a very public and brutal humiliation.

"We wanted a team that played with a lot of fluidity," said Santos, when asked about his decision to drop Ronaldo, among other big but not quite so stellar names. "Cristiano is more fixed, he stays in a more determined role towards the box. Gonçalo has different characteristics: he is very dynamic and that's what he ended up showing us." With Morocco to come, Ramos seems to have made himself undroppable, while on the other hand his forlorn and beleaguered captain increasingly seems unpickable.

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QUOTE OF THE DAY

"A page turns today… Thank you for your love. Thank you for your unparalleled support. Thank you for all this happiness shared since 2008… I will miss you" – Eden Hazard channels his inner William Blake as he calls time on his international career to jump on the love boat.

▲ *Thanks for the memories, Eden. Photograph: Gabriel Bouys/AFP/Getty Images*

FOOTBALL DAILY LETTERS

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England's Kyle Walker will not 'roll out the red carpet' for Kylian Mbappé

Jacob Steinberg in Doha

Kyle Walker has said he will not "roll out the red carpet" for Kylian Mbappé when England play their World Cup quarter-final against France on Saturday.

As England ramped up their preparations for their daunting clash with the world champions, there was concern for Gareth Southgate over Declan Rice missing training because of illness and Callum Wilson receiving treatment on a minor niggle.

There is also yet to be any clarity over whether Raheem Sterling plans to return to Qatar after flying back to the United Kingdom following the burglary at his Surrey home. But overall the vibes were good as the squad worked under cloudy skies at their Al Wakrah base.

It is hoped that Rice will be ready to return to training on Thursday and there was plenty of optimism from Walker, whose duel with Mbappé is expected to be one of the defining factors when England look to end France's defence of the trophy.

"He's one of the best, if not the best, in the world," England's right-back said of the France striker. "I understand what I need to do and that's to stop him. It's probably easier said than done but I don't underestimate myself.

"I have to take extra care and give him the respect he deserves, but not too much respect because he's playing England and we can cause them problems. The game is not England v Mbappé. The game is England v France.

▲ *'I understand what I need to do and that's to stop Mbappé. It's probably easier said than done but I don't underestimate myself,' says Kyle Walker. Photograph: Peter Cziborra/Reuters*

He's a good player and in good form but I'm not going to roll out the red carpet for him and tell him to go and score. I'm representing my country at a quarter-final of a World Cup. It's do or die. If we lose we go home. He's not going to stand in my way and hopefully winning a World Cup for my country."

Walker's speed is a vital asset for England's defence and he believes he is quick enough to keep up with Mbappé, who is leading the race to win the Golden Boot after scoring five goals in four games. Their battle will be fascinating.

Mbappé scored two exceptional goals when France beat Poland in the last 16 and he is expected to be fit despite sitting out training on Tuesday. "He had a different kind of training session to do," the France defender Ibrahima Konaté saidon Wednesday. "There was nothing worrying about that."

The worry for Walker will be how to play Mbappé. The Manchester City defender can draw on facing the Paris Saint-Germain striker in the Champions League. Mbappé, who has scored once in three appearances for PSG against City, once described Walker as one of the few defenders capable of making him suffer.

"It's nice to hear from a good player that he's had a tough game against me," Walker said, though he was keen to stress that France's threats are not limited to one individual. He offered a timely reminder that England also have to keep a close eye on Olivier Giroud, Antoine Griezmann and Ousmane Dembélé.

"We are not playing tennis," Walker said. "It's not a solo sport. It takes a team to win a game of football. They have to worry about us. It's not just us worrying about them. We have great players, and great players who can come off the bench and affect games.

"Full credit to the likes of Marcus Rashford and Jack Grealish, who have come off the bench and scored a goal. Bukayo [Saka] has been on fire. Harry [Kane] has got his goal now. We have got goals from all ends of the field. I can tell you training is tough marking some of these guys. You want to play against the best guys in the world but we have some of them in that changing room."

Walker argued that it does not matter if England, who have kept three consecutive clean sheets, are regarded as underdogs. "I don't think it changes," he said.

"Favourites, not favourites, it's a game of football. We take our hats off to them. They are world champions. But I can assure you that each and every one of us will not be rolling out the red carpet for them to go and perform, thinking it's a theatre for them to showcase their great talent. We have also got great talent."

But as much as Walker tried to steer the subject away from Mbappé, the conversation kept coming back to him. If there is a concern for England it is that Walker has just returned from groin surgery. He lasted the entire game when England beat Senegal in the last 16, but he is 32. Walker knows he has to use his experience against Mbappé.

"You have to use a little bit of nous," Walker said. "You can't be a speedboat without a driver. You need to use your brain when needed and I can't get as tight to him as I would with other players. I remember playing against Theo Walcott once and I was getting so close to him and then all of a sudden he gets behind you and that's your lesson taught.

▲ *Kyle Walker (left) has faced and fared well against Kylian Mbappé in the Champions League. Photograph: John Berry/Getty Images*

"You need to make sure the mistakes you make are not costly mistakes.

"Whoever plays at right-back, he's going to get the better of you one, two, three occasions a game. He's a great player. You need to make those occasions as few as possible and not costly."

They have to worry about us. We have great players, and great players who can come off the bench and affect games

‘Sometimes it’s cruel’: Spain depart World Cup cursing shootout

Sid Lowe in Doha

▲ *Spain players watch the shootout defeat by Morocco. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian*

Luis Enrique asked for a thousand penalties; he got a thousand passes. Spain exited the World Cup early, and in style. There is always something sudden about how it ends, even if it’s been coming, even as you know it could happen.

“All that’s left now is nothing,” Unai Simon said when it was all over. “Just [the need] to assimilate the fact that we’re out, that none of this has brought any reward.” It was late, and it was done. The following morning at 9.28 Spain’s bus pulled out of Qatar University, heading to the airport.

“We’re going home in a bad way: it’s one of the worst days,” Rodri said, and then he used a word that would be repeated often in those minutes soon after Spain had been knocked out by Morocco: “Football’s like that, sometimes it’s cruel,” he added.

Cruel kept coming up; unjust, too. “Football was unjust again,” Ferran Torres said. “The way it happened is cruel,” Marcos Llorente said. “We’re out on penalties, in the cruellest way,” Sergio Busquets said. “It’s always head or tails, and it came up tails.”

For Pablo Sarabia, it had been particularly painful. Three minutes he played at the World Cup, four times he touched the ball, twice he hit a post: with 10 seconds remaining and the first attempt in the shootout. Sent on purely to take a penalty, he had come *this close* to saving himself the need and sending Spain through instead.

“Fate was capricious there,” Luis Enrique said. Yet he knew this was not purely chance; he had said so himself, 24 hours earlier. On what would turn out to be their penultimate evening in Qatar, Spain’s head coach had dedicated his pre-match press conference to taking apart the cliches.

As the questions came in, so did the responses: “That’s a cliche, so is that.” Mostly it was done in defence of a style, an act of (self-)vindication, and he was enjoying giving a bit back, but the theme continued when it came to the inevitable question of the shootout. “It’s not a lottery: that’s a cliche too,” the coach insisted.

Yet nor was it something that he alone could control. Luis Enrique said he had told his players that they had “homework” before the World Cup: he wanted them to take a thousand penalties at their clubs. If they waited until they were in Qatar it would be too late. When the shootout came, it was a shambles. “I wouldn’t change anything except their goalkeeper,” Luis Enrique said, but Spain took three and didn’t score any.

If it’s not a lottery then, much as the margins are fine, did that mean they had done something to deserve this? “I don’t believe in chance,” Simon said. Sarabia had scored 16 out of 16 from the spot, Carlos Soler scored a hat-trick of penalties against Real Madrid, Simon studies sequences and styles closely and he carried his paper with him.

But the conditions in which Sarabia especially stepped up were not ideal – albeit his was actually the best struck of the three. “Horrible,” one player called the penalties. “If the penalties had gone the other way we wouldn’t be talking about what’s wrong: we would have been in the final of the Euros and still in the World Cup,” Llorente said.

He was right, of course, but it poses a more significant, recurring question about the philosophy with which Spain have kept ending up on the spot and on the edge. This was the third consecutive knockout game to go to a shootout under Luis Enrique: they beat Switzerland, lost to Italy, and went out against Morocco. It was the fifth consecutive game they have gone to extra time.

Over the past two tournaments, they have won just twice inside 90 minutes. Elimination in Russia 2018 was also on penalties. They had played 1,000 passes, and not scored. On Tuesday night was under a different coach – back then Fernando Hierro was an emergency appointment replacing Julen Lopetegui – but it felt familiar.

Spain had played more passes than anyone in the group stage by a long way, 2,737, compared with Argentina’s 1,992. There were 1,019 more on Tuesday night. But 77% of possession yielded just one shot on target. It may be simplistic to question the style – a cliche, Luis Enrique would say – and the finality and fury of some conclusions now is absurd, but it is legitimate too.

Certainly, it is legitimate to ask if it is applied as it should be since opponents always close off and defend deep and breaking them open, as Spain’s coach said after his side’s exit, is “the hardest thing in football”.

If your style entrenches teams in that counter-approach, that suggests adjustments may be needed, some alternative sought, some tightening of the screw. And that’s the thing here: Luis Enrique was a twist on tiki-taka. His tenure wasn’t just a repeat of the last decade.

At times, it has worked well. Under Luis Enrique Spain scored six against Croatia, Germany and Argentina, and started this tournament with seven against Costa Rica. But there has always been a weird sense of not knowing what was coming: they could be brilliant or, well, really not. And the speed, the intensity and incision with which the style was imposed then and for much of the game against Germany, was absent against Japan and Morocco.

There are other elements, from the youth of the team to the lack of a forward, the defensive vulnerability and that intangible idea of character and leadership. Of course, there are names of absent men being thrown into the mix too, questions raised about Luis Enrique’s desire for the group to be very much *his*. Some in Spain have been waiting for this.

But, while superficial, most of the fall out crystallises in the style, not least because the manager’s discourse and approach is so clear, non-negotiable, which is not the same as saying it’s properly applied.

“We followed his idea from start to finish,” Ferran Torres said. “We’re the only team that takes risks; others don’t until they’re behind,” Luis Enrique insisted. But perhaps that’s only half true, applicable only to one end of the pitch. In attack, it sometimes seems it is not risky enough.

▲ *Pablo Sarabia’s penalty comes back off the post. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian*

“Maybe we don’t have the characteristics of players to attack that kind of defence,” Rodri said on Tuesday night. “Maybe we need more one against one on the wings, people breaking into space.”

That reflection invites simpler yet more profound analysis. Do Spain have the players? Does the perfection of an academy structure with a clear footballing philosophy, the entrenching of a system, create wonderful midfielders but lead to the absence of precisely those players who can break the system? Since they won the 2010 final, Spain have won just three games at the World Cup, and none in knockouts: against Australia, Iran and Costa Rica.

“If we had won on penalties, we would be talking about a great job,” Rodri said. Mostly, they were talking about Luis Enrique’s job. His contract is up. He had resisted committing his future beyond this competition; now the federation, seeing the old ghosts appear, familiar flaws, is less inclined to continue, too. A decision will be made soon, the sporting director said.

“Now’s not the time,” Luis Enrique said, on his way out of the stadium and the World Cup, “now I just want to get home to my loved ones and my dogs.”

Qatar to miss 1.2m World Cup visitor target as 765,000 arrive for first 17 days

Reuters

▲ *The World Cup in Qatar, the first to be held in the Middle East, is considered one of the most expensive in terms of tickets and hotels. Photograph: Robbie Jay Barratt/AMA/Getty*

Qatar received just over 765,000 visitors during the first two weeks of the World Cup, according to an organisers’ report, falling short of the country’s expectations for an influx of 1.2 million during the month-long event.

A huge surge in visitors at this stage is unlikely with only eight teams staying on in Doha, and eight games left out of the 64 in the tournament that began on 20 November.

Organisers had previously identified the peak period for international visitors to be 24-28 November during the busy group stage, when 32 teams were playing four matches every day.

The 7 December report was prepared by the Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC), which organises the tournament, and said that the first 17 days of the World Cup saw 765,859 international visitors, more than half of whom have now departed.

The report registered 1.33m match ticketholders and 3.09m tickets sold across the eight stadiums in Qatar for the tournament that ends on 18 December. A Qatari official, who did not wish to be named, confirmed the figures. The Supreme Committee did not respond to requests for comment.

The tournament in Qatar, the first to be held in the Middle East, is considered one of the most expensive in terms of tickets, hotels and alcohol, sales of which are restricted.

Fewer international visitors than originally forecast led to an unexpected glut of accommodation but has also averted major overcrowding or traffic headaches in Qatar, the smallest country by both population and area to host the World Cup.

The influx of visitors represents a 25% boost to the country’s resident population of three million, of which only about 10-12% are Qataris.

“With over a week of competition still to go, a wave of new visitors has started arriving from the nations that made it to the quarter-finals,” the Qatari official said.

More visitors are expected to flock to Qatar for popular matches after the country lifted entry restrictions for nationals and residents of fellow Gulf states. Cumulative stadium attendance at the first 52 matches was 2.65 million, the document said.

▲ *Morocco fans do the thunder clap during the last-16 win over Spain. Photograph: Tom Jenkins/The Guardian*

Previously, Fifa said that stadium attendance in Qatar had surpassed attendance at stadiums during a corresponding period at the 2018 World Cup

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in Russia.

On Tuesday, hundreds of Moroccan fans flew into Qatar on special flights arranged before their team's victory over Spain. It is expected that similar fights will be laid on to allow last-minute fans to fly in from overseas to watch their teams attempt to advance.

Visitors to Qatar must obtain a Hayya identification card prior to travel as it doubles as a mandatory entry visa during the tournament period. On Tuesday, Qatar dropped this requirement for Gulf Cooperation Council countries.

Rabiot warns England that France have more to offer than Kylian Mbappé

Ben Fisher in Doha

▲ *Harry Kane and Kylian Mbappé will be on opposite sides in Saturday's World Cup quarter-final at Al Bayt Stadium. Photograph: Fifa/Getty Images*

Adrien Rabiot has warned England not to fixate on stopping Kylian Mbappé and has admitted France are wary of the set-piece threat posed by Gareth Southgate's side.

Mbappé stepped up his preparations for Saturday's World Cup quarter-final after returning to full France training on Wednesday following a recovery session indoors on Tuesday.

Rabiot said France must sharpen up at corners to prevent England from prospering when the teams meet at Al Bayt Stadium. England face the world champions hoping to advance to a third straight semi-final at a major tournament and successive semi-finals at a World Cup.

Southgate has identified set pieces as pivotal to success at tournaments. England scored nine of their 12 goals from set pieces en route to the last four in Russia four years ago and have scored two this campaign. Bukayo Saka's first goal in England's 6-2 evisceration of Iran stemmed from a corner and Marcus Rashford scored a free-kick in their 3-0 win over Wales.

Rabiot referenced France's group-stage win over Denmark, when Andreas Christensen equalised from a corner before Mbappé struck to earn victory, as evidence of their need to be alert.

Harry Maguire and John Stones are among England's key threats at set pieces. "I think what can make a big difference will be set pieces," Rabiot said. "They are very good at them. We have weapons too but we are going to have to be vigilant and we cannot make the mistakes that we made against Denmark when it was a corner or free-kick because they can be very dangerous.

"I think it will be a very open match. I think they have the same characteristics as us. They have some very fast players on the wing and full-backs that get forward. We are both quite similar, two teams who know how to move forward very fast on the pitch."

The France defender Ibrahima Konaté pointedly said that "football isn't played by one or two players, it is played by the whole team". Mbappé has scored five goals in Qatar and is a strong contender for the Golden Boot.

"We are not dependent on him," Rabiot said. "He has amazing potential and we know that 90% of the goals can maybe come from him. He is very fast, able to make great assists but we also have other players who can make a difference on the pitch in another way. We have a great weapon in Kylian and we're not going to deprive ourselves of that."

The England right-back Kyle Walker, who is likely to be given the task of nullifying Mbappé, said he does not intend to "roll out the red carpet" for the in-form Paris Saint-Germain forward. Konaté said his Liverpool clubmate and opponent on Saturday Trent Alexander-Arnold has been ribbing him since they were pitted against England. "Trent sent me some teasing texts," Konaté said with a smile.

The France centre-back added that just as England would be foolish to obsess about Mbappé, Didier Deschamps' side have no plans to focus on Harry Kane, who took his England tally to 52 goals in their last-16 triumph over Senegal, one short of Wayne Rooney's England goalscoring record. "We're not going to target one particular player," Konaté said. "I've played against him a few times but everybody knows Harry Kane is a very good player, a very English player."

Konaté, who was born in Paris to immigrants from Mali, was asked about Morocco becoming the first African team to progress to the World Cup quarter-finals since Ghana in 2010. "It has been amazing to see the African countries impress the world with their performances," Konaté said. "I'm really happy to know that Morocco are through to the quarter-finals. I am focusing on France because that is the country I have chosen to play for but I hope Morocco do well."

▲ *Adrien Rabiot during France's last-16 victory over Poland. He warned his side they need to be vigilant after conceding from a corner against Denmark. Photograph: Jean Catuffe/Getty Images*

Rabiot, who had a short spell with Manchester City as a 13-year-old, came close to joining Manchester United earlier this year and said he maintains ambitions of playing in the Premier League. "I really liked the atmosphere [in England]," the Juventus midfielder said. "It's really something that's only in England – it's different to France and Italy. I've always said that I'd like to play in England and I still have that desire. I would like to evolve in the Premier League."

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